

玩具堂

イラスト／bun150

ガイド・
トゥー・
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ゼロから
育てる
電腦少女

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角川スニーカー文庫

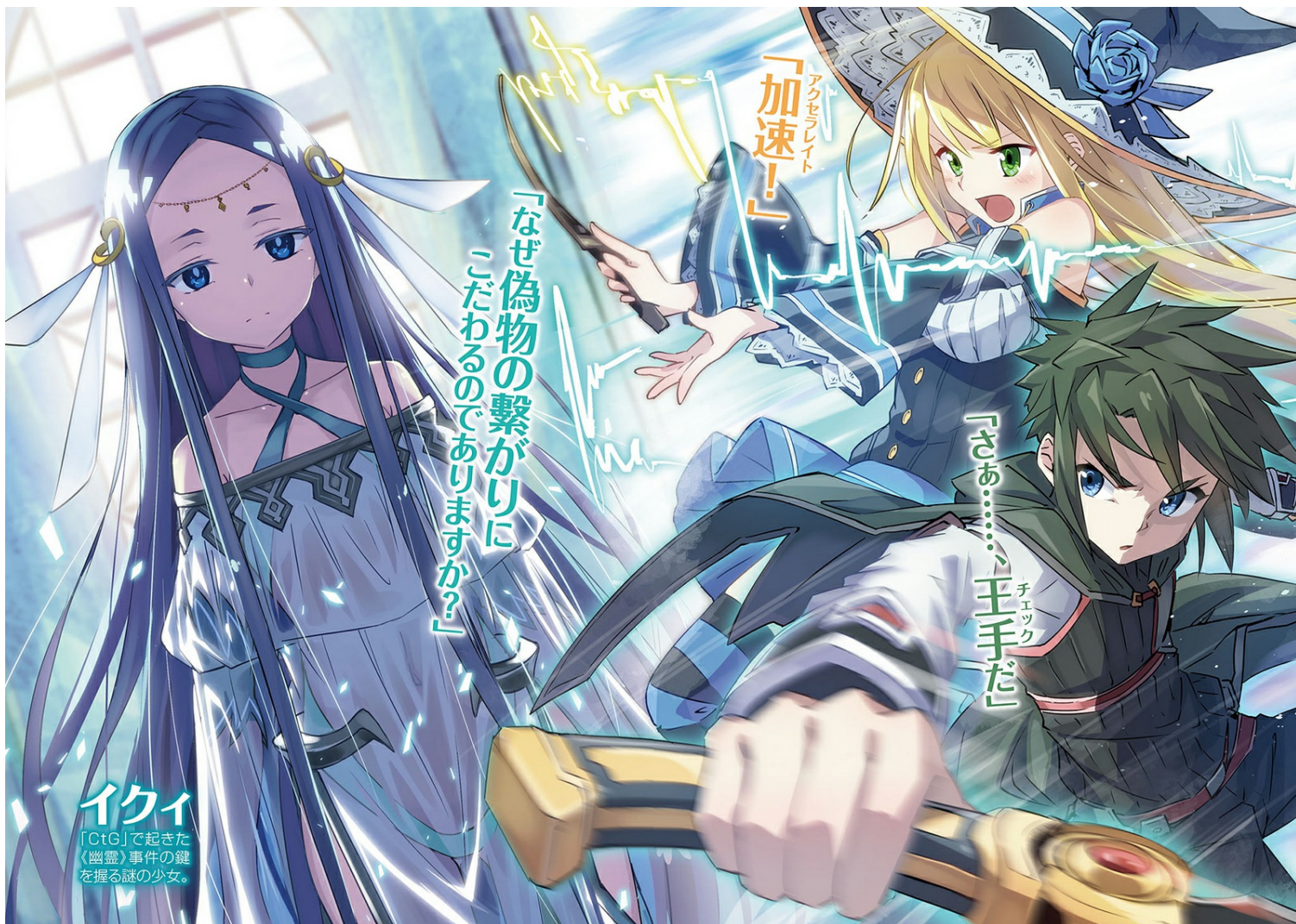


ゼロから育てる電腦少女

2







CHARACTER

現実世界

CtG



こづち ふゆ ふう
小槌冬風

遊の幼馴染み。一人ぼっちでいる遊を「遊ぼっち」と呼んでからかうが、実は遊のことを、とても気にかけている。

に いろ まん せい
新納蔓世

ハルハの誕生に関わる謎の人物その1。
部屋の中でもサングラスを取らない。



はし め ひだり
甚目左

ハルハの誕生に関わる謎の人物その2。
たまに遊をからかってくる魅力的なお姉さん。



かす が い けう
春日井遊



クランプ

16歳の高校生。実は母親が大人気VRMMO「CtG」の開発者だったが、いまは理由あって美遙や春羽と同居している。CtGでは「スカルベのクランプ」と呼ばれている。



くさ み はる
釘宮美遙



ミーファ

高校生の女の子。初対面の遊と一緒に暮らすことになる。男の子が苦手なのに、CtGでは強気な性格のネット弁慶。現実でもゲームでも胸が大きい。



はる は
春羽



ハルハ

「CtG」で生まれたクランプとミーファの娘。「CtG」から現実世界にやってきて!?



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Prologue

That renowned master and artist the Demiurgus hides it away, causes it to vanish behind life's make-believe. We, to the contrary, love its abrasiveness, its unruliness, its rag doll ungainliness. Behind each gesture, each movement, we like to see its exertion, its torpor, its sweet ursinality.

– **Bruno Schulz** [*A treatise on mannequin or The Next Book of Genesis*], Station Yukio Kudou, Heibon Company Library, [all Schultz's novels] 2005

**Relative translation to [マネキン人形論あるいは創世記第二の書]:
Mannequin's theory or The Second book of Genesis**

In the middle of the rain.

Young Kasugai Yuu walks alongside the grown up Kasugai Yuu as he squeezed his hand.

What wondered him wasn't the fact that there were two of him, but his awareness of the texture of his own hand. He had never experience what was it like to have his own hand pulled by himself before, he should never have.

Think, think, think.

He then remembered, the hand that his younger-self knew was that of his mother's.

Remembering his mother's hand, he began to reimagining what he held with his hand which created a new sensation.

By the time he did, his younger-self transformed. This time it's a hand that he once held before.

Kodzuchi Fuyufu

With a younger body just like the time when she was in elementary school, she was wearing children's clothes which were black in colour, like the colour of the dark rain.

During their early elementary school year, her body was very weak. So Yuu was

asked by her mother to accompany her to and from school and they always walked together so that she doesn't fall.

As time passed, their position got swapped and Fuyufu had become healthy, which resulted into her pulling Yuu's hand instead.

It could also still be the case that Fuyufu's hand that Yuu held was only that of her younger self.

Because, Yuu doesn't know the sensation of grown-up Fuyufu's hand—

—This dream would most likely appear under the back of his eyelids. By the time he opened his eyes, the figure of young Fuyufu disappeared and the gentle sunlight and familiar ceiling greets them.

It's a good thing that he woke up, but the aftermath of the dream weighted down his head. His younger self, younger Fuyufu, Fuyufu's hand, Fuyufu's fingers.....

He could feel his cheek burning up thanks to the unusually vivid dream he just had.

(....Could this mean that I wanted to touch Fuyufu?)

It's hard to think that it's a physiological issue or anything. So it might just simply be a result of frustration.

Having bad thoughts right in the morning, he directed his eyes to the side—and for a moment it felt like his heart was about to stop.

In front of his eyes was a sleeping face of a girl.

She wasn't his childhood friend whom he just saw in his dream. Fuyufu was indeed a short-haired girl like a Zashikiwarashi ^[1] but the girl in front of his eyes had long hair. In contrast to Fuyufu's small and slim body, this girl had average height and considerably well-rounded and rich body.

Their faces were only a dozen centimeters away from each other, and he could see her lips trembling with a small sigh.

It was an early summer morning

And a quiet morning.

Between these two bodies lying in the same bed, a languid heat was in the air. Excessive sweat was flowing out. His throat went dry. He experienced a minor fever.

Kugimiya Miharuru

She was the girl he began to live with together for the past week. Actually he first met her only last week, and from that moment they immediately began to live together.

However, they had spent over two months together in other world.....

Regardless, their relationship wasn't so intimate that they had to live together. The reason why they ended up sleeping together was all thanks to a certain person with complicated circumstances.

As if trying to prevent each other from rolling off the bed, Miharuru's finger was resting on Yuu's hand. As soon as he recognizes the warmth he quickly pulled his hand away in a hurry.

(Why other person's body is so hot.....?)

While trying to hold down his shock — also the fact that the one in front of him wasn't Fuyufu makes his sides hurt — Yuu tried to raise his upper body without waking Miharuru up. It would be problematic if she woke up now. Furthermore, the “circumstance” that forced them into their current situation somehow wasn't in the room.

Miharuru had the tendency to distrust opposite sex which was also directed towards Yuu. In this situation where that girl wasn't there, for them to be together alone in the same bed was nothing but problem.

Fortunately Miharuru slept soundly. Even if he tried to talk to her she would just reply him with her gentle breathing.

Miharuru was the one who chose the brand new pajama. So it should match her own size. However, it looked like she feel cramped as she heavily breathed up and down— and by that time he was consulting his brain while averting his eyes from her.

“Daaaaaaddy~~!!!!!!”

In that cute energetic voice, the main culprit of why Yuu and Miharu have to sleep together came in while shouting.

In front of the left-open door, a child imposed a stance, as she raised a shout of victory.

“Haruha was able to go to toilet alone!”

“Nnn.... U....”

The moan responding to the clearly loud voice was in fact came from no other than the now awakened Miharu.

Several seconds later, Miharu screamed after becoming aware of solidified Yuu who was in the position of close enough to him peeping her face. Haruha on the other hand, lively blinked her eyes and stared blankly as she still held her pose.

Kasugai Haruha

She wasn't born in this world. She was one of the artificial intelligence, Hadzar, born in the world of the endless reality, a role playing game『Cradle to the Glaive』— otherwise known as『CtG』.

Shortly after her birth, Haruha was entrusted to Clamp, Yuu's avatar, and Mifa, Miharu's avatar.

The two were the pair who triggered the 《Marriage》event in the game, an event that can only be triggered by the pair who are determined to be ranked the most ideal by the computer operating『CtG』. All done to determine which couple was the most suitable to be Haruha's parents.

And Haruha who rapidly grew under Clamp and Mifa's parenting received an artificial body as an experiment held by “Human Equilibrium Institute” institution who appeared at Yuu's house in real world.

In order to look over Haruha who was both physically and mentally unstable, Yuu and Miharu ended up living together with Haruha in Yuu's house. The three of them sleeping together was also part of Haruha's mental care.

A week had passed since the beginning of their new and awkward life.

For the past week, Yuu attended to school like usual, Miharu was left to clean up Kasugai household storeroom and prepare her own room, and Haruha would

play with Miharuru with some toys or inside 『CtG』—

“....Ho-how is it?”

Familiar uniform along with Miharuru with whom he was familiar with. But it was the first time he ever saw the two together as one.

“Aa.....”

Yuu who had been busy preparing a simple breakfast in the living room was having trouble commenting on Miharuru who had just dressed and came down from her room on the second floor.

Miharuru was dressed in the uniform of the school she would go to starting from that day onwards. She had an anxious face, but it was hard to guess what worried her.

“Mm..... That’s.... a proper uniform huh”

“.....You’re so random.....”

Miharuru’s anxiety immediately changed into her dissatisfaction. But, lisp is like a trend for high school boys. It would be unreasonable to blame him for that.

Nevertheless, it had only been a week since they first met face-to-face. Hence, to him she is “his daughter’s mother”, a fact that he couldn’t fully comprehend. As a result, he couldn’t figure out the right step to take.

Then, hesitant Yuu was saved from Miharuru’s stare by Haruha who had been waiting for the breakfast while sitting on a cat paws’ patterned cushion.

“So cute! Mommy is great!”

She ran in with unstoppable vigour to hug Miharuru who bend down and caught her with her chest where Haruha buried her face into it like a mole.

Miharuru blushed as she narrowed eyes while stroking Haruha’s head who hugged her tightly.

“Thank you, Haruha. Today, I’ll also go to school. So be sure to watch over the house with Hajime-san, okay”

Hajime Hidari, one of the Institute’s staff in charge of managing Haruha, would come to Kasugai households and take care of Haruha during the day. So she

should come today as well.

Haruha stood silent, and let her head rest to Miharu's care.

Yuu felt a little uneasy. Haruha was extremely terrified for being separated away from Yuu and Miharu. Just sleeping alone made her anxious enough to make her wanting the three of them to sleep together.

"Haruha, are you okay?"

When Yuu called out, Haruha replied cheerfully with her usual playful carefree face.

"I'm okay! After Haruha saying "See you", Haruha will hear "I'm back" later. Haruha remembered the drill!"

"..... Is that so? So watching over the house is easy task right?"

"Haruha had mastered it all."

Yuu felt slightly hot as he looked at the figure of Haruha who was tapping her chest through her pajama with all knowing-look.

A daughter, who was born just two months ago and existed only inside a game.

This feeling was probably different than what a normal parent would have. This child grew up this much in merely two months and was still growing even more after the incident where she put her life at stake for their sake.

"Compared to that, I'm—" thought Kasugai Yuu.

I'm still unable to walk past my mother's death for the past six months, and just this morning I also saw a dream of my younger self, just what person am I?

I'm a child, a parent, a man, and a high school student.

But I'm not an adult.

He sighed all by himself, and apologized to Miharu, who was pouring milk for Haruha, from within his heart.

You look great— while getting sick of himself for being a coward who couldn't even say a single honest impression.

Obtained life in virtual world, the seed of new world and the Hadzar girl who obtained artificial human body, Kasugai Haruha.

The only son of one of 『CtG』 developers, the boy who became Haruha's father, Kasugai Yuu.

Triggered 《Marriage》event inside 『CtG』 along with Yuu's avatar, the girl who became Haruha's mother, Kugimiya Miharu.

Their daily life adventure would continue that day as well. Continued like as if it was the definition of life itself.

Then, Yuu and Miharu went off to school leaving Haruha all alone, bored and the house under her care.

Hence, the curtain for the second chapter of the seed of this new world, shall now rise.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ A demon in Japanese Folklore, stemming from Iwate Prefecture. More info:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zashikiwarashi>

Chapter 1: The Boy Who Attracts EVIL

Part 0

In the morning classroom one month away from summer vacation, the topic of final exams and schedule for vacations shakes the class with the shrill noises of students. Shortly before homeroom begun; Yuu was laying his cheek on top of his desk as if he let his consciousness be cradled on it. Throughout the week, due to his various duty and exam study, Yuu is lacking sleep.

“Oi Yuu~. For the English passage, we only need to study till the part where Ted will have surgery in the gas station right?”

The one who spoke to him while not reading the mood at all was Itono Kouta. As a friend who had known him from middle school, his high school debut with dyed brown hair looks so painfully soothing. That’s him, one of the few friends that Yuu had.

Yuu answered without hiding any of his drowsiness.

“I thought it ends at the scene where Aregura sees a weird lizard. If you’re unsure, just check in the summary site through the school LAN”

“Is that so?” As he said that, Kouta sat down on the seat in front of Yuu. He rested his chin on the backrest, and continued to talk to Yuu who continuously emitted the aura of “please let me sleep”. It maybe because of his simple innocence, but his behavior feels so refreshing.

“Somehow the teacher is late today”

When Yuu tapped the single plate^[monolith]-type terminal placed on the corner of the desk, the default display of the Holoskin ^[1] and the current time is shown. It sure had passed the usual time for homeroom.

“Did something happen?”

Yuu had no words to answer Kouta’s restless question. If he answered, it

would lead to the catastrophic question of “why do you know that?”.

Then Yuu went silent, and Kouta (without permission) later confirmed his doubt about the English passage with Yuu’s terminal, in mid of that, the answer for his question arrived in front of the classroom.

“My name is Ku-Kugimiya Miharuru.....”

A transfer student who transferred in this overly subtle timing right before the exams naturally caught everyone’s interest.

“Kugimiya-san transferred here from her school in Kansai because of family circumstances”

While the homeroom teacher Higuchi-sensei straightforwardly told the reason for her transfer—which was not exactly a lie—, everyone in the classroom noisily exchanged gazes. The girls, meanwhile, were looking at the boys going “Uoooo!!” in a way like seeing a koala in the zoo while grasping their fists.

It was Yuu alone who, when he saw Miharuru, stiffened like a mirror. It appeared she noticed him and so she occasionally sent a restless gaze at him.

Natural as it is, the fact that both of them are living together is a secret to everybody in the school. They also can’t afford to let Haruha be known to the public. The submitted residential data is also a forged one made by Hajime.

Because of that Yuu couldn’t openly help her, and the only thing he could do was give a 『CtG』 hand sign “do your best” each time their eyes met.

“.....There are only a few more days before the summer holidays, so it is nice if we can get along well. P-pleasant to be here”

Taking account of how timid she was, to be able to say that without biting her tongue was a great accomplishment.

Shortly after the homeroom class was over , Miharuru was instantly surrounded. She didn’t even have the chance to sit on her chair.

“Where do you live!?”

“Do you have a boyfriend back there? Long distant relationship?”

“Do you bring a lunch box? Let’s eat together ”

“Have you decided which club you want to join? Want to look for a mountain analogy in the holy mountain club!?”

Among the girls were a group of aggressive student who surrounded Miharu and bombarded her with questions and club recruitments. Even guys and girls who are not that aggressive seemed to be turning their ears in order to hear even a little about the newcomer’s personal information.

To answer the barrage questions, Miharu groaned and answer one at a time.

“E, erm.... err, I’m boarding in one of my relative’s house.....”

To be precise it is “the house her father’s uncle is managing” but in broad sense it’s not a lie.

“I don’t have any boyfriend.....”

She is a respectable girl, but strangely don’t have any experience in dating (it seems).

“For lunch..... I heard there is a student cafeteria here so.....”

Miharu can cook some simple food, but having the same launch box as Yuu is a bit too much, and to cook both differently would take too much time and be too uneconomical.

“I-I don’t have any plans to join any club”

Miharu had a reason to ensure her time playing 『CtG』. Haruha’s condition forces her to regularly login into the game, and Miharu herself wanted to train her avatar to protect her there.

—Like that, Miharu dutifully answered, but the rapid questions, club recruitments, and advices didn’t show any glimpse of stopping soon much like those talk-loving aunties in the neighborhood.

Her eyes then met Yuu’s and he delivered hand signs— “Follow-up” “Go” “?”.

In exchange, Miharu lightly shook her head. Before going to bed yesterday, she remembered, considering the oddities of her transfer time she wanted to get used with the class fast.

But contrary to her will, and putting account her shy personality; her capacity

had already been overwhelmed too its limit.

The continuously increasing comebacks soon turn ambiguous, and the atmosphere of the surrounding girls felt uncomfortable.

“Ah, sorry we, all of the sudden.....”

“We just can’t read the mood right.....”

The lapped refraining words gradually became distant ones.

“No, not at all, not at all you see..... Ermm”

Miharu’s restlessness caused a panic. She must’ve pictured the future of herself facing the summer break without getting well with the class and then be forgotten soon after. Yuu who’ve seen lots of Miharu and Mifa’s expressions know that.

As expected, he should’ve just gone as a lifeboat for her no matter how unnatural it would be.

It was when Yuu about to stand from the chair, there—

Foosh

As if darkness had just descended, the atmosphere in the classroom stiffens.

Naturally, everyone’s gazes gather towards the classroom entrance. There stood a female student from the nearby class. Right behind her there was three other girls standing, the identity of the intruder was Yuu’s childhood friend with petite clam face.

Kodzuchi Fuyufu.

No one knew why silence fell upon her arrival. Could it be because of the strange force that girl had?

Or maybe, it was because Miharu who was on verge of panic went frozen in an instant.

“Oh, Yuu, it’s Kodzuchi-san”

Kouta, who was sitting on Yuu’s desk while observing the transfer student, said in teasing tone. As a friend from middle school, Kouta roughly knew about Yuu and Fuyufu’s relationship. However, Yuu, who was confused by Fuyufu’s sudden

invasion, was unable to react to his friend's mockery.

Well, there's only one person in this entire school who would be the target of this mysterious pressure that Fuyufu emitted silently.

Who? No other than the transfer student, Kugimiya Miharuru.

As if her dismay a while ago was a lie, she walked towards Fuyufu and showed a cool and collected smile.

"So you're Kodzuchi Fuyufu-san"

"And you're Kugimiya Miharuru-san"

The moment they exchanged that normal but bizarre greetings—the entire class went,

shock

It was like the static sound of rushing electricity.

One of the students who happened to be at the place later testified—

『Come to think of it, the moment the two met face to face, something was torn.

.....Scissors. That's right, like a scissor. Each time the two blades cross paths, something in the middle will be destroyed—

That's what I saw from those two』

Casual-light, textured, long hair, a rich figure, and a large grin on her face.

Having contrasting appearances from head to toe, Kugimiya Miharuru and Kodzuchi Fuyufu simply face each other in silence. It was just that, but the amount of mysterious Doppler Effect created by those two girls shook the morning classroom.

"Ouch... ah, my lips got cut"

"Does this mean those two's presences distort the space and deliver atmospheric pressure.....?"

The girls who were surrounding Miharuru a while ago wiped their sweat in shock.

"No, that's just idiotic"

Yuu finally open his mouth and retort, but the girls, who were putting on lip cream in a hurry, didn't hear him.

“.....Mmmn, this atmosphere, could it be——”

“D-do you know this, Rokkaku-san the historian woman !?”

Meanwhile, a dowdy glasses girl spoke like she figured out something, and Kouta prompted for the answer.

The glasses girl— Rokkaku Hasuko from the History research club let out a trembling voice in astonishment.

“Yes, this atmosphere is precisely... Uwanariuchi”

『Uwanariuchi』 is.....

A custom surrounding marriage that was held from middle age Japan to Edo era!

It was a custom where when a husband parted with his ex-wife and immediately took in a new wife, the ex-wife would raid the new wife's house with an advance notice. At that time, numbers of women were called in accordance to their identity on both offensive and defensive sides. The picture depicted from the brawl of both sides was the sight of a women battle!

Although it's a way to pull out an arbitrator before the settlement, it's known to bring out casualties due to the overwhelming heat of the participants. Scary!

By the way, 『Uwanari』, one of Kabuki Jūhachiban with the motif of Uwanariuchi, is a play that depicts the love and hate relationship between two woman against one man. ^[2]

“Uwanari..... what an awesome textually. A guy sandwiched between two girls..... so enviable!” ^[3]

Kouta moaned with slightly red cheeks as he looked at the word Uwanari that Rokkaku wrote on the optical blackboard with a pen-shaped device.

In contrast, other class members who were listening to Rokkaku's explanation by her side easily shook their hands.

“No no, Itono-kun. After the war, ^[4]women and stockings have become

stronger. If he got sandwiched like that, he'll be minced meat, minced meat you know" [\[5\]](#)

‘Hee, is that so, minced meat huh,’ by that time, Yuu’s heart was already half-dead.



He glanced towards Kouta and then he realized.

“Uhee..... B-but, wait a moment. It’s certain that the atmosphere they’re having is that of a conflict. But, this should be their first meeting. I was in the same middle school as Kodzuchi-san, so I’m pretty sure that’s the case.”

“That..... I don’t know. But both of them know each other’s names.... they must have dark circumstances that we can’t even imagine !”

gulp the sound of gulping came from all sides who are witnessing the standoff between the two girls in silence. Then finally, Fuyufu opened her mouth.

“Pardon for my rudeness earlier”

It must be the day after Haruha appeared in the real world, the time when they met in the supermarket. At that time, Miharuru revealed the truth of her living together with Yuu which made Fuyufu speechless and frozen in place. (Set that aside, it was the first time Yuu ever saw Fuyufu become speechless)

“I was just surprised seeing a person with courage as big as the first person in humanity who ever ate a sea cucumber”

Fuyufu glanced at Yuu when she said “sea cucumber”. Yuu’s heart then sunk into the deep sea.

Against that, Miharuru tilted her neck as she clenched her fist in front of her own face.

“And so you bothered to come all the way here to greet me. Thank you very much. —And also, Kodzuchi-san, didn’t your precious dog run off and get lost? Your face doesn’t look that well, are you okay?”

Miharuru glanced at Yuu when she said “dog”. Yuu then sees a vision of himself wearing a collar and living inside a dog house.

“No need to worry, first of all I didn’t even have a dog. But— that’s right. If I happened to have such a mongrel, then I must castrate him so he won’t bother the neighbors and other ecosystems right”

“What a coincidence. I also thought the same thing from the bottom of my heart”

The conversation of the two was only exchanged between themselves. But, the

will within those words ignored the law of sound wave physics and deflected painfully towards a certain boy's nether region.

“We might unexpectedly go well each other”

“Indeed. I would like to be friends with you”

.....

Ufu.....Fufufuu.....

Fufuffuffu.....

Cloudless sky. In the morning classroom illuminated with fresh sunlight, only the hollow laughter of Fuyufu with an emotionless expression and Miharuru with a mask-like smile echoed.

The ghost mansion-like classroom continued like that until the teacher came and forced them to scram.

Part 1

The class for 4th period was P.E. It was shortly before noon, the yellow sun on the cloudless sky shone brightly emitting such strong heat that it was literally screaming the word “summer”. So strong, that it hammered the students’ shoulders to the ground.

However, the heat was nothing for Miharu, who was now under the shadow of the roof hanging from the dressing room, but the same couldn’t be said for the boys who were recording the scores for high jump on the field.

“Haa...”

Sighing, breathe tingled with the smell of chlorine and her swimsuit soaked—was Miharu, after she finished her swimming trial for 50 meters not too long ago. She now appeared to be exhausted.

Both of her legs and arms had gone numb after having to furiously hit the water so many times and she still felt the feeling of being inside the water remained within her head. Spacing out, she stared at the small puddle at her feet that made from the water dripping from her bristles and swimsuit.

(I’m tired..... I like swimming though, but)

Swimming class right on the day of her transfer. Not to mention that her body still hadn’t settled in with the environment yet, needing to wear a swimsuit that was adjusted in a hurry felt strangely tight and really uncomfortable. Now relaxed and sitting on the rocky poolside, she closed her mind and body.

Being shy of strangers, with the addition of transferring at a highly irregular time, Miharu was suffering from mental fatigue. It might also because she steeled herself, not wanting to show such disgraceful display in front of Yuu.

In such predicament, she still managed to feel a person’s presence and raised her face up.

“Uu~..... it sure is hot right?”

She was being called by the girl who appeared to have just finished her

swimming trial and was now removing the goggles that was hooked on her head. For a moment there, she couldn't recognise who it was because she was of a different classroom and had different attire. However, she then remembered the owner of that slightly nasal voice. It's Nogi Nao from the the class committee. She crumpled down right beside her like as if she was about to fall.

“Are you tired? Well, a pool class straight after transfer can sure is tough.”

Her straightforward attitude puzzled her. Since this morning, Miharuru received nothing but overly polite treatment from everyone in the class. It was as if they were interacting with a executive from a mafia or something. Not knowing the reason why, Miharuru became diffidence, but at that moment Nogi was open heartedly talking to her.

“No, I'm fine.....”

Miharuru's answer was really awkward. When she was being Mifa she was able to actively interact with others, but when she returned as Miharuru, this happened. It was a vicious cycle where her own self-hatred gradually ate away her courage.

Nogi's smile did not waver however, but it appeared she was having trouble as to what to say next. And as if panicking, her eyes wandered everywhere.

“Aaa.....Errmm.....Ah”

Then her eyes stopped. She was looking towards the ground field where the boys were doing high jump.

“Because today's grade will go straight on their report, the boys are serious. Usually they're lazier about it.”

“Aa..... to make up for their poor grades huh”

The pool is located on the hill. One could simply look down at the field through the fence. When she looked over where Nogi's eyes were facing, it certainly seem like the boys were waiting in line, serious and without whispering to each other.

“Ah, it's Kurino-kun's turn!”

The one who cheered was one of the girls who talked to Miharuru this morning.

Alongside her friends, she pointed her finger towards the boy who was about to do the high jump. As if like a signal, the boy started his run-up.

Despite being showered with attention of the onlookers, he managed a brilliantly executed jump over the bar, good enough to impress the eyes of amateurs. With great posture and movement, he landed on the mat and comfortably rested on it.

“Yahoo! As expected from track and field club’s star!”

The girl from before — Tsukami-san — cheers. She must be his fan.

In contrast, Nogi let out a calm voice.

“Fumu, Kurino-kun huh..... Handsome Guy Spirit^[6]rating— 72 points I suppose.”

“Wha!? — why Nogi! Kurino-kun is the star hope of track and field club, he has good looks and personality, he should get a solid 88 points right!?”

Tsukami did not let that remark pass by. It appeared she didn’t like Nogi’s scoring of him and as a result, she glared at her demonically. Nogi received the stare calmly, and Miharuru, who was sitting on her side, shrugged. (But still, her modesty of not giving 90 points sure is cute, Miharuru thought)

“Hmph... Look at the truth Tsukami. Kurino-kun sure is a good fine thin macho man. But, he is also the person who claimed that he got the worst score in the intermediate test; don’t forget that he is a shameful macho man.”

“I-Isn’t it cute though?! Or more like he is an athlete so all that matters is his speed! What do you want, a Savannah Puma that can calculate trigonometry or something!?”

Doesn’t that mean you’re treating him the same as an animal..... is what she wanted to say, but weak-minded Miharuru lacked the courage to speak. Nogi ignored her and continued scoring the other guys.

“Oh, next is Ishito-kun huh. 81 point”

“Wha, why is such a delicate weak boy receiving a higher score than my Kurino-kun!?”

“He is not yours you know~”

“Aa~, but I also like Ishito more. Glasses boys are hot”

By the time she noticed, the girls who were waiting for their turns joined them and started holding a boy rating competition.

Naturally, Miharu, who had just transferred today, was unable to catch up to them and largely ignored the conversation— and then...

It was Kasugai Yuu’s turn came for high jump.

“Aa.....”

It appeared he didn’t notice her. From afar it appeared he was a bit tense. He was currently checking the condition of his sport shoe.

(Kasugai-kun, good luck.....!)

She soundlessly cheered for him and involuntarily clenched her fist.

He was the only person Miharu knew — excluding that certain Kodzuchi-something— in this school, and also, the person who knows about Miharu herself.

Earlier, during the break, he had stood at the hallway and waited for her to come out from the toilet to give her a strange advice “Our class, well, is a little bit noisy and filled with a bunch of irresponsible students, they are quite noisy but they’re harmless. So just take it easy.” Honestly, it was hard for Miharu to respond to.

She was certainly troubled as to how to respond, and not even sure if she was able to do it properly, but she felt a bit more comfortable thanks to him.

—Miharu had a secret ally. That fact became a cushion that softens the damage of her negative thinking.

When she returned her attention to the field, Yuu still hadn’t taken his turn. The student before him had failed to clear the bar and the mat position was being shifted so it took time to prepare. Yuu rushed to help.

“Kasugai-kun huh.....”

Naturally, his name was also put onto the chopping board named ‘gossip’. The score Nogi, who was sitting right beside her, gave, deliberately rang in her

ears—

“66 points, give or take.”

Twitch

Miharu felt her own cheeks cramping.

“Oo, Chairman. That sure is a harsh score you gave.”

“Nnn~..... His looks and attitude is not that bad though. He is also the most calm amongst the boys.”

“Yeah”.

“Well, how to say it... that is all he’s got.”

“Ooou, straight to the point.”

“Ahaha, that might be right~. He always goes home immediately after school and his private life is a complete mystery.”

“Unfriendly..... well not so much, but he sure is a little dark. He is not like that right now, but after school, he always wear such a depressing face, right~”

“And recently he also appears to be lacking sleep and all.”

“Or more like! Because Kasugai-kun told that idiot Kouta some exam test tips. Kurino-kun’s rank fell you know! Talk about needless favor!”

“That’s some unjustified hostility you know.....”

As if they were at a shooting range, snapshots fired at Yuu were gradually being thrown into Miharu’s ears.

And the ‘first impressions’ spoken by her classmates unceremoniously swept away Miharu’s hesitation.

“.....Is that so?”

“Eh?”

The first one to react to Miharu’s murmur was Nogi, who was right nearby. Her face showed delight upon hearing Miharu finally taking interest in the topic.

“What do you mean?”

“That person... Kasugai-kun, I had talked with him for a bit.”

“Ah, come to think of it, his seat is right beside yours.”

That’s right, for whatever reason Miharu’s desk ended up right beside Yuu’s. But this sheer coincidence surely helped her. If she’s with Yuu, she won’t feel as nervous anymore.

They had both slept next to each other every day after all. Therefore, in the matter of Yuu, she was the one who knew him the best among the girls in the class. Even Kodzuchi Fuyufu wouldn’t know that Yuu have a mole on his inner thigh.

That small pride filled Miharu’s weak heart and allowed her to speak clearly like when she being Mifa.

“Yes. He surely does look a little bit clumsy but he is kind towards me. And even though he looks sleepy, he is still willing to help his friend to study for a test, doesn’t that mean he is a good, caring person?

Even now, look, he is going to help them fix the mat.”

The girls stopped and looked at each other pondering. They were recalling memories of him.

“Aa~..... come to think of it, when I spilled my juice in the classroom he helped me to clean it.”

“C-certainly he does seem to get along with Kurino-kun.”

With Miharu’s protest as a trigger, the girls’ opinion wavered, and the girls started exchanging glances with each other, trying to dig up more information from each other. —Meanwhile, Miharu’s likability towards Tsukami, who was still focused on Kurino, gradually increased—.

Miharu felt glad and loosened up her face. It felt like she was being praised. Feeling her fatigue eased all of the sudden; she curled her toes.

(As I thought, like Clamp, she is the type to make a wall around herself..... Ever since I ran away from home I had no time to put on a façade)

Once she thought that way, Tsukami started to look a bit embarrassed. She felt like laughing straight from the bottom of her chest.

—Thus.

Like a finance share, once it started to rise, people will start to invest in it more and more, likewise as the topic heated up, the girls' voices began to show more and more interest towards the man in question.

“.....Erm? He might unexpectedly... be a high quality man?”

“Now that you mention it, his face is my type.”

“He sure gives the vibes that he will do anything for his girlfriend”

“Not long ago, Itono said that his mother was a game creator. Isn't that cool?”

“Ah, one time, during lunch break, I woke up Kasugai-kun who fell asleep to inform him that our next class was in a different classroom, and then he said 『Thank you^[7]』 with a sleepy voice..... he was pretty cute. Kyaaaaaaaa~kawaii!”

“Ouh? What a very interesting event”

.....

It was Miharuru who said in a cold voice.

With a steel-like smile, she had immediately stood up.

Nogi went “?” as she looked up at her. However Miharuru ignored her, and spoke as she looked at Yuu who had just finished fixing the mat.

“Therefore, that thing is only 40 points.”

『EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEH!?’』

The girls's united reaction towards Miharuru's re-evaluation of Yuu echoed throughout the poolside.

“I-it got lower..... really, from our conversation, it actually got... lower”

“Are you sure about that, Nogi-san?”

“Y-yeah.....”

“The 『Ya』 in kindness is also 『Yuu』 in inductiveness” ^[8]

“So the『Ya』 in kindness is..... 『Yuu』 in inductiveness.....!”

Nogi repeated to herself as if she was just struck by lightning. She wasn't sure

but it was probably better not to pry too much into it.

“People like Kasugai-kun worry about others too much and couldn’t make any decision by himself.

For example, let’s say you ask Kasugai-kun 『What do you want to eat for today?』. His answer would be——”」

Right before P.E during classic literature class, because her seat was right beside Yuu, she asked him 『What should we do with tonight’s dinner?』 through a note paper. Likewise, she then wrote 『What do you want for dinner?』 on the same paper, and his answer was,

“『Anything is fine』! Is that even an answer!? And then, when I made the food as I liked he ended up making a subtly reluctant face! Unbelievable!

That’s right—— if you end up dating man like him, you will end up experiencing 『If you don’t like the special spicy croquette from the supermarket in front of the station then say so from the beginning! 』situation every day!

And because he was always like that, he will surely never confess to his childhood friend whom he liked, and will continue stretching his relationship with her and irritate everyone around him!

In the end, he will end up an idiot^[9] who gives the daughter he had with another woman the name from his childhood friend! Yeah, that’s for sure!”

Miss-good-styled Miharu stood up with her exquisite swimsuit figure. It appeared that her tirade was haunted by the sense of crisis approaching.

“That..... that idiot huh..... well, it certainly is idiotic.... Huh..”

Nogi hurriedly nod up and down like a Akabeko^[10]
After watching them in silent, Rokkaku Hasuko, who was still wearing her swimming goggles, then said,

“I was thinking about Yuan Shao and Liu Biao”

Yuan Shao and Liu Biao are characters from 『The Three Kingdoms』whose indecisive personality brought idiotic fatal flaws to both of their ruled domain.

Under their lead, the girls exchanged feverish whispers.....

“A, amazing..... unlike us who can only make vague guesses..... just by merely sitting next to him for a day, you can make such specific and detailed observation as if you’re living together with him!”

“Are you a master? A love master?”

“The strength of her word was on a different level, it’s very convincing..... that’s right, 40 point.

Kasugai-kun got 40 point, 40 point equals to idiotic Kasugai-kun!”^[11]

Like this.

Miharu receive acknowledgement and strange status within the class, whilst Kasugai Yuu had finally taken a jump. Barely jumping over the bar, he made a smile of satisfaction.

Part 2

“Nnn~.....” Kasugai household living room. Hajime Hidari was lying down and her throat rang like a frog on the sofa that Yuu or Miharuru usually sat on when going inside 『CtG』.

On top of her plump thin belly was a laptop displaying the biometric data taken from Haruha's choker in real time. This psychedelic screen showing bizarre amounts of information might look like some kind of Avant-grade art to other people's eyes, but Hajime is able to accurately grasp all of the information on it.

(As expected, with the absence of her 『parental figure』, her mental stability greatly decreases..... this is bad, considering her condition get this bad on the first day. It might be impossible to have her go to elementary school for the time being)

She muttered inside her heart and shut down the laptop. After she moved the laptop to the table, she loosened her limbs and looked at the ceiling. As a woman who appears to be around the age of a college student, her appearance right now is what you would call untidy.

Since she was not under the gazes of her boss or colleagues, she was able to laze around, however her dissoluteness is notably remarkable today. Luckily neither that adolescent boy Yuu or no-nonsense Miharuru are currently absent, her light clothes of summer sweater and tights are scattered on the floor.

Meanwhile.

Her observation target, Haruha was currently lying on the table watching TV.

Since she had already finished watching all episodes of her favorite 『Revive! Mystical Priest Girl Rasupu-chan 5』 up to the latest one, what she was watching now is a morning rerun of a period drama called 『Kojyuurou Katanagoyomi Wanderer-Arc』.

However, Haruha whose mental age is way younger than her appearance seemed to be bored of the show excluding its sword fighting scene, and out of the blue she tried to stand up,

“Ouh”

“Gfuu!?”

As expected she abruptly jumped and did a body press on Hajime.

Regardless of her mental age her body had the mass of an eight-year-old. For Hajime’s body that has no abs in particular, the striking force from the impact wasn’t a joke.

“*cough*..... ha, Haruha-chan? What’s up all of a sudden?”

When she asked with puffed cheeks, Haruha buried her face into Hajime’s belly and answered.

“Don’t know”

“Then don’t jump out like that okay.....”

“Somehow, Haruha feels itchy..... Haruha wants to break pots”

Born from a game, Haruha’s emotional expression is still a bit confusing. But it seemed Yuu and Miharu have gotten considerably used to it however.

Hajime tried to interpret it in her own way, and while stroking Haruha’s hair she asked.

“Are you bored? Want to go inside 『CtG』?”

Usually during this time of the day, along with Miharu she went inside 『CtG』, playing with the Nanny NPC Payakino, and having fun by doing some simple quest. But Haruha unenergetically rose up and shook her head.

“Somehow, Haruha can’t pull out the energy.....”

(Well..... she certainly is lonely alright)

While letting out a small sigh, Hajime opened the notebook while holding Haruha. Her non-mental statuses are extremely high. With this.

“After I finish putting away my remaining work and eat lunch, do you want go outside and play”

“? Is it okay?”

“Yeah. Since now you can walk normally without falling over after all.

Let's play outside till it's time for Yuu and the others to return and go to pick them up"

Haruha's cloudy face instantly wrapped in light. She then happily clung on Hajime's chest.

"Thank you Hidari-chan!"

"Hey hey..... if you want to be spoiled do it with Miharu-chan instead"

As Hajime peeled Haruha off her while holding back her laughter, Haruha stared at her with a blank wondering look on her face. When she asked "?" with her eyes, Haruha reported with a loud voice as if she had made a great discovery.

"Hidari-chan is bigger than mommy, but has smaller boobs!"

Hajime threw Haruha to the carpet in silence.

Part 2.5

The student cafeteria that was said to be made as a hobby by the first principal who did carry out his role as a chef once, is as always crowded with many students. Since it was right before the final exam, there were students who had their meal alongside student-use tablet above the table and eat while reading their textbook or notebook in the same time. Meanwhile, there were also some groups happily talking away foolishly, either not taking the tests seriously or just being defiant. In midst of all that, a pair of a boy and a girl was being shrouded by the subtle atmosphere.

“.....Just what are you trying to do?”

The one who asked that was a boy who still seemed to be confused whether or not to eat the cheapest meal listed on the corner of the menu, the drippy rice bowl (average prime) ^[12] he ordered. He was class 1-C's Kasugai Yuu.

“What?”

The one who answered back was, the girl who was currently facing him as she pierced her grilled mackerel meal with her chopstick. She was class 1-B's Kodzuchi Fuyufu.

This girl who was still emitting some bizarre intimidation force ever since that morning, and as usual looked a bit sleepy and low-tension, was childhood friend of Yuu.

Yuu added small amount of soy sauce onto his rice bowl and then roughly stirred it together.

“What I was trying to say is, why did you come after Kugimiya-san?”

Fuyufu did not answer. She just simply appeared to be concentrating in extracting small bones out of her mackerel. Then she flat out replied.

“So you're not together with Kugimiya-whatever huh?”

“She is with other girls from the class. It is best for her to get used to with everyone as soon as possible.”

The person in question actually planned to eat in the cafeteria. However, she got caught by some of the girls and forcibly taken away somewhere by them the moment lunch break began.

Tsukami who appeared to be the leader of the group said

“Master! I’ll treat you with a Sara-Udon bread^[13] (but without its plate) but I have something to consult with you, please!”

Somehow, she seemed to be respected by them so it was very unlikely that she would be bullied.

Yuu put down his chopsticks, and opened his mouth as he stared at Fuyufu.

“.....You see Fuyufu. I’ve explained this to you before, Kugimiya-san and Haruha are a part of a social experiment..... well, it’s basically about having those who have trouble with their family to live in one house for starter. But there are also observer-like people inside the house. So there is nothing dirty about it or anything.”

That was the setup they had established. If a third party comes to even inquire about it, this setup allows them to guarantee and establish a public benefit corporation without any actual entity as a cover up.

.....Considering the fact that Haruha had become Haruha^[14], Yuu had prepared himself for the moment to reveal the truth. However, they were still under the control of a quite dangerous authority^[thing]. Yuu and Miharu couldn’t run away from them with Haruha, and Yuu did not want to involve Fuyufu into all this.

“For once, this is a private experiment. So it will be lot of help if you don’t speak a word about this to others.”

“I’m not an Esper who can read other people’s minds though.”

Fuyufu did not lock her eyes with Yuu and say something that did not match the conversation at all.

“But Yuu is an incompetent fool who can’t even properly lie.”

“.....It’s not a lie.....”

“Heee. So from that social experiment-whatever,『Haruha』suddenly shows up?

What an awesome probability equal in a Planck scale? [\[15\]](#)

First of all “Haruha” was the name Fuyufu gave to her doll when she played house with Yuu when they were kids. Yuu hunched it, but it did seemed like Fuyufu still vividly remembers it.

Both annoyed and delighted by that, Yuu answered while trying his best to control himself.

“Tha..... that’s right. What an amazing coincidence!”

Seeing how Yuu was still being persistent about it, Fuyufu sighed as she locked her eyes with him.

“Like always, you’re a stubborn person. Did you forget that you ended up eating soggy cage all thanks to that boring pride of yours?”

“Wasn’t that when we were still in..... third, no, second year of elementary school? Just stop remembering old stuff.”

“I just can’t forget that kid’s boiled stupidity-looking crying face. Pfffft. Stop it. Don’t make me remember such laughable stuffs during my meal.”

Despite pretending to laugh while pressing her lips with the point of her chopstick, Fuyufu’s face still bore no expression. Although she was clearly mocking him, that gesture really made her look cute, he thought and he missed his chance to fall back. There was no way he could win.

Yuu gave up trying to persuade her and finally directed his chopstick towards his drippy rice bowl— when suddenly, he heard a small voice.

“.....You sure used to cry a lot back then.”

“Well..... I was a little kid after all.”

“Is that—”

She didn’t finish her sentence.

For a while after that, both of them silently moved their chopsticks. By the time both of them were done eating, Fuyufu spoke.

“So you only eat that for today huh.”

Recently, Yuu often ate the daily special meal that had both high price and quantity. It was simply because he needed a lot of energy to deal with Haruha. However that day was an exception. There was a reason why he ate the cheap and small drippy rice bowl and he normally answered her question.

“Ah. Looks like I’ll be having that Soiren Mart super spicy croquette for dinner after all. For now, I don’t want to eat anything heavy.”

“.....Mmnnn”

Yuu looked up because he felt that Fuyufu’s voice was a bit cold. And that, was just his thought.

Fuyufu who had already finished her meal faster, put her tray to the side and took a pose. She then laid both of her elbows on the table for rest and put her hand together right in front of her face. He had seen that pose somewhere. It was a pose made by a veteran detective in the middle of an interrogation in a police drama.

“Yuu, who usually hates spicy food decides to eat that hellish croquette for dinner. —In conclusion, he is matching his food choice with someone else’s.”

“N-no, that.....”

“Even though you dared to lie to me, you seem to be quite obedient towards that transfer student.”

As if she had pinned something, Fuyufu’s eyes stopped in motion. There was no violence in her stare. But, it felt as if it would suck anyone who got in contact with it. *Bzz* she was clearly displeased.

But despite all that, Yuu was still a “daddy”. So he couldn’t afford to be a child forever.

“To-..... I just wanted to have some spicy stuff today, that’s all!”

As he said that, he grabbed a bottle of a pepper that was in a set on the table.

“I’m not going be a kid forever so my taste also changes! Look!”

As it is, he poured the pepper onto his remaining drippy rice bowl. His pitiful display was just sad and maybe because of that — or simply just taken aback by his action — Fuyufu easily broke her pose and let her small body rest on the

seat's back.

“.....Well, I don't care anyway because that lie of yours will soon be easily exposed after all.”

And below that definitely not so big table, Fuyufu gently kicked Yuu's shin with her leg. Despite not being that painful, Yuu still released a gaze of protest and Fuyufu return it with a challenging glare.

“Like always, wasn't it?”

While feeling his instep getting stepped on by Fuyufu's toe, Yuu could only turn his eyes away.

She's right. Fuyufu had always exposed the truth behind Yuu's lies. That's why, in a way, Yuu felt relieved. As long as he had Fuyufu by his side, his lie would always be set correct. But....

.... this lie is one lie that he must hold on till the end, just for Fuyufu's sake.

Part 3

Hidari and Haruha arrived at the arcade. Located right in front of the station somewhere between Kasugai household and Yuu's school, it occupied one of the corner spot of the shopping mall's amusement facilities which was targeted for the resident of eastern housing complex.

It was a bit too modern to call it pastoral, but at least it was an idyllic sight.

And standing in front of the store,

"Wow, this place becomes fancier every time I visit"

Hajime muttered as she stretched her stiff shoulders since she hadn't driven a car for quite a while. In the arcade that was targeted for all ages, the walls and benches were painted in pleasantly warm colours.

(It was kind of ironic seeing a hangover place for game-loving people painted in colours that were used in a school or a kindergarten)

She then remained silent and looked down to the child who was standing by her side.

She was Miss Kasugai Haruha in her Outing clothes coordinated by Miharu. While her legs were spread wide resembling the kanji for "person" ^[16], her mouth was half-open as she looked around the place.

Hajime at that moment, lost to her curiosity and asked,

"This place is the infamous Hall of Fame, otherwise known as 'The Arcade'. How is it Haruha? As a person who was born from a game."

"It's jumbly jumbly."

"Well, that's the good part."

Is that so~..... Haruha was really impressed as she restlessly ran her eyes all over the places. From state-of-art arcade machine to ultra-longtime seller crane game, she was surrounded by varieties of game machines for the first time in her life.

“Yuu-kun and Miharu-chan just sent a mail saying that they will stop by here after school. Until then, let’s wait in a café or something”

“Okkie~”

Haruha’s face brightened the moment she heard the name of her parents. She then cheerfully nodded and turned around to the arcade.

“Still, it’s jumbly jumbly.”

Judging the shine in her eyes, it looked like she understood what Hajime meant who let out a sigh of relief and smiled as she passed a piece of card to Haruha.

“Hmm? What is this?”

“This is your purse. You can play the game after you plug this into the machine.”

Similar to when Yuu used credit card for shopping, Haruha immediately understood everything after hearing the explanation about the arcade mechanism. Hajime felt satisfied and sent Haruha, who was about to burst with curiosity, out there.

“I’ll wait on the bench over there. So have fun playing.”

And then, Haruha was thrown into the herd full of games.

“Ooo..... It’s sparkly”

While folding her arms seriously, she challenged the rock-paper-scissors that featured a prize to the winner. It’s a game where you play rock-paper-scissor against a cute lovely mascot in stereoscopic video and receive candy for each constitutive wins.

Haruha still hadn’t fully grasped the concept of common sense. But since she was good at reading, she instantly understood the system of the game. However, the card which ultimately became Haruha’s budget, only had 1000 yen in it.

“In here, a person can’t live when they run out of money..... which means money is like your HP^[17].”

It’s something Yuu told her once.

Haruha fortunately hadn’t experienced “hunger” yet. So sensuously, she still

didn't know what it meant to be poor. However, she was excited for being entrusted with something similar to money that Yuu had cherished all the time.

"Being wasteful means game over. So Haruha must be good with this and help daddy out."

At that moment, she remembered that she once tried to "Submerge a bottle in bath to increase its volume of water to reduce water expenses". She had learned to do that from a TV program but eventually got yelled. Turned out she shouldn't have done that while the Cola was still inside the bottle.

After thinking for a while, she decided to ignore the rock-paper-scissor game. She could play it with Yuu or Miharu at home anyways, and that sounded many more times enjoyable.

"Wonder if there are more games worth my time." Haruha said, as a small boy probably four years old and a preschooler, in front of her ran pass her.

You shouldn't run. It's dangerous.

Haruha suddenly remembered what people usually told her. Perhaps, it might be beneficial to say them to that boy.

But, she didn't.

Haruha couldn't really move her body properly in real world because she was not a normal child born there. So it might end up being useless for real children —

However, as she thought of that the boy lost his balance and almost fell.

"Aa!"

She instinctively cried, but suddenly, a woman dashed forward and caught the boy. From the looks of it, she seemed to be his mother.

The boy then held the hand of his mother, turned towards and said,

"I'm sorry for scaring you, Onee-chan^[18]."

With these words, he left with a smile.

Haruha then waved her hand and said "Bye-bye..."

(.....Should I have said it to him back then.....?)

To her, he was a complete stranger. However, if he had gotten hurt, it would have made her heart goes muzzy. Unlike in 『CtG』, where “things to do” would be listed right in your head, she was completely clueless on how to do so in real life.

“It’s so jumbly-jumbly.”

While feeling really hazy, Haruha went on exploring until she finally came across an irresistibly attractive game to play.

It was a crane game where you had to catch a cute little stuffed doll. It was called 『Sheep Pot』, which was filled with a series of stuffed doll based on deformed sheep. Looking through the window one could see all the insides mixed in together like ingredient of a Nabe^[19].

“This looks fluffly-fluffy. Haruha will get this as a gift for Mommy.”

Miharu and Yuu should be surprised by receiving a present from Haruha and that would praise her for sure. And then the two of them would give Haruha a big huggy—

Motivated by her own delusion, Haruha pulled the footstool that was next to the machine and immediately insert her card.

For 100 yen, she could play only once and for 200 yen, she could play 3 times. But it was okay if she failed several times, and if it was too hard then she could just play other game. So, relying on logic as she always did, Haruha faced the mountain of stuffed doll.

—However Haruha was not aware that once you started playing it, it would not be easy to stop...

Several minutes later.

Haruha’s face turned blue as she looked at her own card.

—Her very important budget only has about a 100 yen remain in it just from merely playing a simple crane game.

At first Haruha tried to catch the doll from the very top, thinking that it would be easy. But it turned out it didn’t go so well. She managed to get close to getting it but in the end, she couldn’t get it into the hole.

After her 100 yen + 200 yen of 4 turn failures, Haruha finally realized that her current dexterity would be insufficient for this mission. But no matter how high the risk of losing was, her desire to give Miharuru a present was just too strong for her to just give up.

As result, Haruha fell straight into the Arcade's trap of money-wasting and continued to recklessly challenge the close-to-unwinnable game.

This crane game..... for Haruha, was exactly a swamp. A man-eating..... swamp!

“.....It shouldn't be like this.....?”

If Haruha still had the money she wasted on the crane game, what more could Haruha do? She could have tried the one where Haruha had to fight crocodiles, or the one with a drum, or the one where cards shows up— Haruha could no longer play those games she wanted to play after this.....

Then, she lost all her strength and sat down on the footstool she stood on. After that, she tightened her grip on her near-empty card. The lightness of it was exactly that of a splurge.

“This is, poverty.....”

“You're exaggerating”

A voice from above. It was not Haijme. It was an unfamiliar voice.

Haruha raised her blank face and saw a girl looking down at her. She appeared to be younger than Yuu and Miharuru. She was a short haired girl who was wearing a sports jumper^[20] that hung above her uniform.

“...? Who are you?”

In 『CtG』 you could change to Extend^[AR] mode to see other person's name and simple status, but in the real world you couldn't see other person's information tag no matter how good your eyes were.

While playing with her dyed red tress the Jumper girl dodged the question and asked back.

“Which one do you want?”

She directed her sharp gaze inside through the crane game window. Still clueless, Haruha climbed on the footstool and pointed the stuffed doll she was aiming to get up till now.

“Errm, that?”

“Geez..... you can’t even get that huh?”

The girl then set-in her own card. Then, she casually operated the control stick that Haruha was struggling with and easily got the stuffed doll. Two in fact.

“There”

She said as she passed the doll over to Haruha. Those two dolls were the “Glasses Sheep”, a glasses-wearing sleepy-looking sheep, and the “Brush Sheep”, an expressionless sheep with a brush on its mouth.



“Ah..... for me?”

“You suck at so much that it’s irritating. Have that and go home.”

This time, it was Haruha who spoke towards the girl.

“Oh traveler, please tell me your name.”

“No..... I said you’re an eyesore.”

“But mommy said it’s not good to accept an item from a stranger.”

On hearing the child’s argument, she came to the conclusion that it would end up being troublesome.

“It’s Sakura..... Kanna Sakura. Studying in second year of middle school.”

The girl unwillingly unveiled her identify.

“Sakura-chan huh!”

Haruha grabbed the stuffed dolls one at a time in each of her hand like a cheerleader pompom, and gave a dazzling smile in return.

“Thank you, Sakura-chan!”

“.....You’re welcome. Now that you know my name, scurry off home now.”

“Aa, Haruha is Haruha. Here is Haruha’s business card.”

She took out a card from her pochette. So even kids nowadays have business card huh..... Sakura thought as she receives it— she groaned.

“No..... You should never give your lost card^[21]. to others you know.”

“But adults give these thing that has name on it to others you know?”

“That’s completely different thing..... Ah, that’s it. I’ll go somewhere else.”

Sakura replied as she held down her sigh.

To put it straight, Sakura was the master of game.

For starters to increase her mental focus, she cleared the slot medal game with her eyes closed. She hit all the crocodiles within one sweep, and she landed a Jolt Blow^[22] on the punching machine— although for whatever reason she used her non-dominant arm for this —

Once she had warmed up she, through Holo Skin and entire touch display, played various 2D to 3D game making her name become recorded on many new game national rankings.

And now, she was about to make a new record on a popular fighting game series—

Clash ! Swoosh ! 『Sieya ! 』

“Yah! Toh! Ah, he flew! He’s a Sumo-san but he flew^[23]

“

Bam ! Bam ! Bam ! 『Here I go ! 』—Dogaa ! K.O.!

“Yay! Sakura-chan’s & Sumo-san’s win again.”

“

You Win ! Perfect !!

“Haaa~.....”

Against the CPU-only boss character that was known to be “Too strong” before it got balanced by the developer, Sakura displayed an overwhelming victory, and with her ears she heard to cheering of a child.

“Sumo-san is strong”

“I’m the strong one here! That Sumo wrestler is just a shitty unpopular character!”

She was able to stubbornly ignore her comment with concentration, but by the time she had won, she had reached her limit. Sakura stood up and turned around. Then yelled at the girl who was watching her playing the game and comment every single second.

On her lost card, the name “Kasugai Haruha” was written, a child around the age of an elementary school kid.

Haruha without hesitation, faced her with sparkling eyes.

“Once Haruha is older, Haruha want to be a Sumo-san.”

“Listen to me!?..... or more like, what are you doing like, following me like a

goldfish poo^[24].”

“Haruha’s game level is really low so Haruha will follow Sakura-chan who’s good with game and get her half experience point. There is nothing to care about.”

“Just stop! You can get only part of EXP by simply joining in battle only in an RPG!”

“But, Haruna got the trick now”

Haruha then tried to move her hand quickly which in the end, only looked like nonsense.

“That’s definitely just in your head……. Eh, oh well. I’m tired somehow.”

After losing her energy due to continuous session of playing games, Sakura sat down on the bench that was kept nearby.

“Haruha brought some snack from home. Haruha want to share it with Sakura-chan. Here, lets share-shary.”

Haruha dug the pochette hanging on her shoulder, and pulled out two individually packaged chocolate buns. With her doll-like small hand, she gave one of to Sakura.

“Ah, you see, share-shary is something Mommy says when eating. It sounded weird so Haruha always laughed. Pupupu”

Haruha began to laugh reminiscing what she just said. Sakura perfunctorily grabbed the bun and delivered a glare at the girl below her.

“…….You’re, in elementary school right? Then, why are you here all alone?

“Haruha don’t go to school.”

“Oo, ouh…… is that so?”

Sakura’s face stiffened. It could be something she shouldn’t ask, so maybe that’s why following word failed to come out.

However, Haruha who had just unwrapped the wrapping paper of her chocolate bun spoke the words, was something beyond worse Sakura could imagine.

“Haruha, Haruha is not a human after all.”

“.....No no, you’re clearly a human.”

Looking at her again, the only thing that was eye-catching about her was only her bright flaxen hair. At least, she was way more normal in comparison to Sakura who had dyed her bangs.No, there was something familiar about those thick eyebrows..... Agh, can’t remember. Either ways, she didn’t look like an evildoer.

“But Haruha can’t eat things like asparagus. When Haruha chew it, Haruhra goes uggeee”

What she just spoke frankly didn’t make any sense.

“.....You can’t eat asparagus. So how does that make you a non-human?”

“Because, Daddy and Mommy can eat it”

.....

For a moment, she pressed her finger on her temple and started thinking. She thought about it, but in the end she still didn’t get it.

“Wha..... wait a moment. Isn’t that completely normal? Things that you can’t eat but that your family can eat. It is a simple personal preference because even I can’t eat raw tomatoes”

Haruha, who was about to take another bite of her bun, suddenly froze and blinked her eyes in surprise.

“.....Eh?”

“Eh?”

Both delivered “I don’t know” question mark through their line-of-sights to each other.

The strange child then spoke in stunned weak voice.

“Human who can’t eat human food is still a human.....?”

Instead of scratching her own head, Sakura scratched Haruha’s hair who in turn squinted her eyes feeling ticklish.

“Yes, human! Or more like, it’s human-like!In fact, a person without any dislikes is weird.”

“Whoaaa, is that so~..... Thank you Sakura-chan! Haruha now remember that IF-Method^[25] is no good!”

The scales have fallen from one’s eyes, was the idiom used best to describe Haruha at the moment.

“No, you....., haven’t you ever seen anyone having likes and dislikes before?

“Eh? No?”

Being told so frankly, Sakura couldn’t help but slam her face into her hands. Just what kind of life this kid had been living that made her to grow up this way? Restless but carefree, full of curiosity but naïve, endlessly cheerful but subservient, and somehow thinks that she’s not even a human.....

(What the heck is she..... an idiot? What a strange girl I ended up with.....”

Maybe I should run away, she thought on one side, as both of their eyes met. Haruha’s interest diverted back to Sakura.

“Sakura-chan’s wearing school uniform. But why you’re here?”

Haruha’s circumstance was pretty confusing to address, so it was more convenient that she diverted the conversation elsewhere. Sakura on the other hand, answered brightly.

“Well it’s obvious, I’m ditching school. For a delinquent like me, going to an arcade in this time of the day is natural.”

“Delinquent? Delinquents are good with game?”

“Of course, it’s obvious. It’s not so nowadays but back in the old days, arcade was the gathering place for the outlaws. In other word, delinquents are the master of games.”

“Uoooh~”

While being deeply impressed, Haruha devoured the bun in her hand as she raised her head.

“Haruha’s Daddy is also strong in game.”

Then she lifted her eyebrows and displayed a fearless grin — with puffed cheeks however — and continued.

“Super strong”

“I see..... super huh. So strong that you had to say it twice. Well, doesn't matter though but that smile of yours is annoying.....”

Ignoring Sakura's weak voice at the end, Haruha said

“Even against Memento, Daddy went like..... bang bang baaan! And defeat her. He is the best”

With heated voice, she went on talking about how she was proud of her father.

“.....What game are you talking about?”

“It is 『Cradle to the Glaive』. We always play it”

“Aaah, 『CtG』 huh. I also have an account for that..... or more like, aren't you a Travel? I don't know about this Memento monster thing, but it's obvious you can't win.”

Travel PC^[Player Carrier] in 『CtG』 is an avatar that can't attack in exchange of not getting damage, player who registered under 13 years old will forcefully have this avatar. But this girl looked like she didn't understand such rule.

(But still..... this kid's father, even if he's very young he must be over thirty years old right? What the heck is up with him boasting his skill in a game in front of his daughter?)

That's what she thought, but his daughter was really happy. So, it didn't matter, maybe? At times like this, she must act like an adult and speak accordingly.

“Well, having a father who would play together with you is gre—”

“Sakura-chan is strong too, but not as much as Daddy~”

“What did you said you pipsqueak?”

Take back that previous statement. Sakura was really not the person who would lose to a father bragging about his gaming skill in front of his kid who was already this big. She then tried to give her a headlock^[26], but Haruha just happily

let her do it to her out of joy. What a tough child?

“.....Listen, kid. For the past three months, I’ve only lost in a fighting game match once!”

“Did you lose to other delinquent?”

She clicked her tongue and released Haruha’s head. Then she roughly devoured the chocolate buns into her mouth.

“.....He is not a delinquent though.....just someone with a dumb face— that’s right, he has eyebrows just like you! He is a guy though. Aaah~..... just remembering him sickens me.”

This time she knead Haruha’s eyebrows with her finger, but Haruha instead closed her eyes comfortably.

“Unya.....n? Why are you so mad?”

“Well..... I lost to a person who used filthy tactics in a fighting game I am most confident at — I hate people who use such turtle-like tactics in those kind of games — And then he— my opponent..... after he won, displayed an annoying face and said『Thank you. It has been a while since I normally had fun playing game』. He was kidding right? What the heck was with that『Normally had fun』crap? Just what game is not normally fun? Is he saying that I’m just an average level opponent?”

That was the unforgettable seed of anger for the past three months. Even though he won, even though he easily took away something from Sakura’s heart, he looked very lonely and his thanks at that time didn’t sound like a lie.

After so much humiliation. And yet,

“And yet, he never showed his face ever since. So, I can’t take my revenge. I tried to look for him around the store nearby, but couldn’t find him..... what a playful bastard.”

After all her complain, Sakura felt relieved as she shut her mouth. Just why did she talk so much in front of a kid she first met?

However, when she glanced towards Haruha, for some reason she nodded with a know-it-all face.

“Haruha know Sakura-chan..... Haruha too will be sad not meeting someone Haruha want to meet. Daddy too, looked sad when unable to meet his Mommy”

Appearing to be reminiscing something, Haruha downheartedly dropped her shoulder. Sakura didn't know what she was thinking, but at least she knew that Haruha was having some terrible misunderstanding.

“I just want to fight him again, not to me—”

She was suddenly cut off before she could finish,

A child's feverish body temperature and odd weight, then rested on her knee. Haruha had slowly stood up and hugged her.

“.....Wha, what are you doing?”

“When Haruha feel lonely, Mommy and Daddy would give a hug. Sumo-san looks lonely so Haruha will give a hug to him too.”

“What a misunderstanding you're having here!?”

Sakura's scream unleashed due to being firmly held by unexpectedly strong small young girl, was drowned in the immeasurable electronic sounds of the arcade —

Part 4

“You didn’t stretch your leg”

“.....What?”

It was four o’clock of the summer afternoon, yet the day was still bright. The evening sky emitted heat strong enough to melt a candy, and the humidity seeped through the ground.

Kasugai Yuu was heading to the Arcade Hajime had instructed him to go to. He had been there before with Kouta and others, so he was able to move his footsteps without hesitation.

The one walking by his side was the Transfer student ▪ Kugimiya Miharuru. In order to hide their relationship, they exited the school differently and then regrouped in front of the station. And the first word spoken after that was “Your legs were too low”. What does that mean?

Still not getting used to her uniform, Miharuru was motionless for each few steps she made.

“During PE in the fourth period. When you did that high jump, your body had passed through the bar, but you didn’t stretch your legs and end up failing”

“Kugh..... did you see?”

“Yes”

During that time, the girls should be swimming at the pool. And come to think of it, you can see the schoolyard pretty well from there.

“You have enough jumping power but your form is bad. If only you can fix that, you can jump as well as Kurino-kun”

While pointing her finger at Yuu, she began coaching him. There was no trace of tension like the one she showed back in class. Just like in their house—the Kasugai household, Miharuru was perfectly relaxed now. She was probably just venting all the frustration accumulated from being surrounded by the girls for the entire day.

It's not like he was not pleased by that, but what she said was just too unreasonable.

"Well, Kurino is the track and field team ace after all. It's natural that I lost to him. I'm satisfied with just breaking my own personal record"

"And because of that, your records are always half-assed. On your last jump you thought you won't make it and just gave up outright. It was shameful you know"

".....What does my jump has anything to do with that?"

"That....."

Miharu shut her mouth and swung her eyes left and right. After needlessly idling with her mouth, she finally found her answer and said it.

"That's— because, you're Haruha's daddy after all。 Haruha's shame is my shame"

"Okay, okay... I get it"

"Wha!? What the heck is with that sloppy answer!That's why you—"

Then Miharu blatantly said an unexpected thing.

"Called a 40 point-worth boy by the girls in the class!"

"Eh!?"

Obviously, that was something he cannot let pass by.

"What the heck is that!? Am I hated that much?"

"Tha-that's right? You were said to be indecisive, idiotic, and something like that.

.....Well, I casually do some follow-ups though. Like, the 『Yuu』 in inductiveness is also 『Ya』 in kindness, and such....."

Miharu who was stubbornly avoiding eye contact and pouring sweat was certainly suspicious, but it was unlikely that she would say such unruly random lies.

He was certainly not popular, but receiving such a low rating was surely

depressing. Yuu heaved a sigh and lowered his head down.

“Well I am aware that I’m not that close with the girls..... but hearing the cold hard truth head on is pretty harsh. Uhaa, depressing”

What Fuyufu calls “Yuu-bocchi” [27] is no longer a joke now. But rather than being hated by the girls in class, it’s more about how Fuyufu would be more snarky; just imagining that makes Yuu heave a sigh.

“.....But still, I’m relieved”

“Eh..... I knew it, Kasugai-kun, could it be you’re the type who likes being despised?”

“What do you mean by that!? Don’t act like Memento now!

Being yelled at, Miharu depressingly replied “Then why do you like Kodzuchi-san?”, but he decided to ignore it. Talking about Fuyufu [her] would make this conversation unnecessarily confusing.

After coughing, he rephrased his words.

“Kugimiya-san, it appears you’ve become quite accustomed to the class, enough to talk with other boys’ right? Since you looked pretty unwell this morning, I’m glad. As expected of Mifa I suppose”

He was aware of how embarrassing his remark was so he avoided eye contact by only facing forward, but there was no response from Miharu at all. Curious, he glanced to his side and saw no one, turns out she had stopped walking and was holding onto a telephone pole with her hand behind him.

“Wha, why 『Remorse』 pose?”

“Nothing..... it’s just a self-loathing stroke, please leave me alone”

Miharu then quickly walked off and became completely silent.

(As always, I can’t understand her.....)

Several months had passed since they first met in the game, and one week has passed since they started living together in the real world. Still, he couldn’t understand what she’s thinking. Furthermore, she is his daughter’s mother, an “instant family”. But at least he knew that she’s not a bad girl.....

(Well..... but, I guess that's how it is)

Yuu's parents were similar in some sense; he doesn't even know how they got married in the first place. The only thing Yuu, their child, knew was that nothing good happened after their marriage.

(Just because we're family, it doesn't mean that we always get along well with each other)

Remembering his mother like that makes him feel less depressed.

Regardless of what he said, he felt saved by Miharu's presence— as he was thinking about that, they've arrived at the shopping mall where their destination, the arcade, was.

“Ah! It's Daddy!”

Shortly after they set foot into the arcade, they heard a completely familiar peppy voice.

As they swung their eyes to the direction of the voice, they saw Haruha who was sitting on a bench and was now running towards them. She ran towards Yuu and Miharu quickly. Haruha had considerably gotten accustomed to the real world, but her running form still looked dangerous.

As expected, her small body tripped midway and was caught by the two of them in time. They gave her a scolding mixed with sighs of relief.

“It's not good Haruha, you shouldn't run in places with lots of things like this”

“Yeah~. There was a kid who was about to trip”

“If you thought about that then why did you run.....”

“Un, sorry”

Haruha admirably apologized, and the Miharu's stern face slowly crumbles into a smile. She knew that she was being too easy on her, but her face makes her feel bad to scold her.

—They've been separated from since this morning till the afternoon. Naturally Miharu's desire to spoil her was stronger than anger. Watching the puppy-like Haruha and Miharu while grinning, Yuu then remembered something.

“.....Come to think of it, where is Hajime-san?”

There was no figure of the woman who emailed them this location anywhere nearby. Once he looks around inside the youngster-filled arcade— what he found was a completely different person.

It was a girl around the age of a middle school student wearing a Jumper over her uniform. Somehow she opened her eyes and mouth wide and glared at Yuu.

Yuu then opened his eyes wide. He knew that Jumper.

“Eh, you’re—”

“I found you, you runaway bastard!”



Zap! with the vigor of lighting, the girl pointed her finger at him. Haruha titled her head in wonder.

“Daddy, you knew Sakura-chan?”

“? Haruha, you knew that girl?”

“Un! Haruha played with her not too long ago!”

“You were just one-sidedly following me around right!?”

From the girl’s loud shout, Miharu shivered and embraced Haruha.

“I-I’m sorry! This girl, erm..... not used with lots of things so..... Ha, Haruha, I said you mustn’t trouble people you don’t know right?”

“But Haruha knows her. Haruha showed her business card and learnt her name from her”

Haruha said “Right~” asking for an agreement from the girl, but she ignored her and went back to glaring at Yuu.

“That day..... ever since that day you defeated me in 『Ultra Battle Era』, the game where I was known to be peerless in the neighborhood! I had shed much blood and tears undergoing an intensive training, in order to defeat you!”

The girl declared passionately. Miharu then asked with a tiny voice.

“Is that so.....?”

“Yeah..... she is the middle school kid I fought with when I went to the arcade with Kouta and the others. Well, she was very strong! Her dynamic visual acuity and reflexes were way beyond human level. I did win, but my HP was close to zero at that time, it was really close”

“.....Sounds fun”

Miharu sounded subtly frustrated, but it couldn’t be helped since it was indeed fun. At that time Yuu hasn’t met Mifa and Haruha yet, and he was obsessively devoted to 『CtG』, so a fighting game was a good change of pace.

For the first time in a long time, he remembers what it meant to “play a game”. That’s why, for Yuu, it was a beautiful memory to remember.....

But it appears the other side didn’t think the same way.

“My name is Kanna Sakura! Today I shall finally have my revenge!

Hehehe..... I shall remind you, I’ve completely analyzed your character, Push Yasokichi, in the past three months! It means your underhanded trick of using that unpopular character won’t work anymore!

“Wha.....!?”

“What happened, it appears you got a hit there! Your face is completely pale!”

Roasted by the girl’s unimaginable enthusiasm, Yuu placed his hand over his mouth.

Pensively, he told her.

“.....Sorry. Actually my character is..... Canadian Mask the Canada Hero”

“Then what was my entire three months for!? Then why, at that time you used Push!?”

“Well, I didn’t have any particular reason or anything..... I mean, Push’s lower large kick feels tempting, doesn’t it makes you feel like trying it out once in a while?”

“Like hell!”

“.....I’m sorry, somehow”

“Don’t apologize you bastard!

Sh*t..... argh, it doesn’t matter now, come on let’s fight!”

Sakura was half-crying. Yuu also felt guilty for somehow wasting her three months of effort for nothing.

(What should I do? I do feel wanting to fight in a while, but today.....)

“Daddy, Sumo-san is good at fighting games! Haruha says go for it”

By his side there was Haruha with shining eyes hoping to see Push Yasokichi. But this girl’s identity has some circumstances to take care of.

Thinking the same thing in mind, Sakura looked at Haruha with a suspicious face.

“.....Oi kid. Why do you call this guy your dad?”

“Nn? After Haru—chrough”

Before the idiotically honest Haruha answered, Miharu silenced her from behind.

“A, ahahaha..... we’re this girl’s relatives. We’re just playing house”

Haruha flopped her legs in objection, but she quickly succumbed to submission

in a matter of seconds to the softness of Miharu's breasts. Usually Miharu was a timid person and a poor talker, but when it comes to protecting Haruha, she would react instantly on instinct and with great force.

"Ha, haaa..."

Rather than being convinced, it appears that she felt overwhelmed by Miharu's breasts that had manage to bury Haruha's entire head in one go.

Yuu found a chance in that. The rhythm he had when he used the Push Yasokichi's ultimate deathblow "Pegasus Rolling Kawazugake" during his battle with Sakura reverberated in his head—

"—Well then, it appears our Haruha had caused you trouble so thank you!

This is just something I forgot to eat when I was hungry though, but take it!"

While babbling something quickly with his mouth, he took out something from his bag and forcefully placed it in her hand. Sakura said "Eh? Ah..." and reflexively received it before looking down on what was now in her hand.

It was another chocolate bun.

"Well, this actually makes me thirsty though....."

—But by the time she looked up with a bored face after receiving the same thing twice...

Yuu and Miharu had fled from the area while carrying Haruha with them in a hurry.

.....

She collapsed on the floor and could only weakly wave back at Haruha who waved at her while being carried like a bag.

"HE RAN AWAY AGAAAAAAAAAAIN!!!!"

Kanna Sakura's scream dissolves in the electron roar and high-pitched force of the surrounding, and accelerated the rhapsody of the evening arcade.

Part 5

“Well, good work. It was hard right” Shortly after they returned back home to the Kasugai household, Hajime greeted them with words of appreciation as if it was other people’s business.

Hajime showed up shortly after the incident and drove them home back to the Kasugai household.

“After all this was the first time Haruha ever interacted with ordinary people alone. I wanted to watch over her without interference for as much as possible. Thanks to that I was able to gather extremely useful data”

At the very least, she confirmed Sakura’s identity and determined that “She has an arrest record but no criminal record, and was not allowed to have propensity of danger.”.

“Well, naturally we didn’t think that she was Yuu-kun’s acquaintance

Well well, the world sure is a small place”

Hajime crossed her legs and started entering information into her laptop. She must be entering the results of Haruha’s communication skill or interpersonal stress test or something.

While putting on an apron in preparation for making dinner, Yuu directed his grim eyes towards Hajime.

“It’s not a laughing matter. What will you do if Haruha’s identity got exposed?”

“Its fine~, no one will believe her anyway. Even if she said that she was a child born in a game, all adult would say she played too much game or something”

“Well you’re right though.....”

The person in question, Haruha, was currently taking a bath together with Miharuru. When he listens carefully, he could hear the sweet ping-pong ball-like voice. She must be reporting today’s events to Miharuru.

Naturally, his eyes shifted towards the two sheep stuffed animal dolls happily

lined up on the table. Those were the “presents” Haruha gave to Yuu and Miharu.

That’s right, for the first time, Haruha “went out” without their presence. His mouth that was about to bitterly scold Hajime involuntarily loosened.

“Well, it’s good that Haruha is having fun”

“What an overly-doting father you’re”

“That might be the case”

Yuu couldn’t figure out what was the intention of the human equilibrium institute that Hajime is in, but Yuu had already made up his mind to be a doting father to Haruha. All for the girl who needed him, laughed with him, willing to bet her life for his sake, and giving him a present like this.

No matter how non-standard of a child she is, his reasons to do anything for her continued to increase each passing day. That’s why.

(I must also once again say thanks to that junior high school student for taking care of Haruha.....)

Next time she demand a match, this time, without running away, he will stand and receive her challenge in full force. As a gamer, and as parent who had his daughter taken care of by, he has the obligation to give thanks to Sakura.

But.

He was worried. Just why was that girl so stubborn about games.

Part 6

Along with the curtain of the night, a thin shower fell. Kanna Sakura who brought no umbrella had to return home all drenched wet and her anger towards her mother who welcomed her at the door increased. Back home early, broke curfew, and had forgotten to bring her folding umbrella, it was a disaster.

“I didn’t do anything that would make father look bad”

“You, it’s not what I—”

She ran from her mother, who scolded her while holding a stew pot, and jumped into the bathroom.

She carefully wiped and folded her Jumper, and took off the rest of her clothes similarly. After washing herself a little she sunk herself into the bathtub.

The pleasant hot water melted her cold body and makes her say “Fuhaaa~~” out of comfort.

“.....What a terrible day today.....”

It was all okay for just coming to a secluded arcade she frequently goes to, but her mood was quickly ruined when she was followed by a self-proclaiming non-human brat, and also, she wasted most of her pocket money in the end.

Furthermore, when she finally found her nemesis claiming to be that brat’s relative, in the end he ran away. A sudden golden opportunity was wasted.

And to top it all off, it rained and she got wet thanks to it. She is cursed.

.....or maybe not, strangely she didn’t feel tired at all. It feels like she saw Haruha’s innocent smile that was stuck in her head floating above on the ceiling. She remembers the time when she got jealous seeing a neighborhood kid own a puppy when she was little.

(That brat, despite being so small she sure is energetic.....)

Maybe she was like that when she was her age. That might be the case. No, just recently she was also like that.

Ignoring the onlookers she continued to practice Judo, and as a result of her effort she was known as a genius.

That side of her is no longer in her, but in exchange she reigned across the country as a top ranker in many games. She never fights any top players who had their names on the magazine, but excluding those monsters, she has the pride of being the strongest.

But to put it in another way, that is the only thing left remaining for the current Sakura. She was running in an invisible rift, chasing after the shoulder she unconsciously touched. That vision was engraved into her consciousness.

That's why she wanted to get it back, by defeating Kasugai Haruha's "daddy".

He managed to run away today, but it's not like she gained nothing from it. What Haruha said—

『It is "Cradle to the Glaive". We always play it』

It's a big game. Furthermore there is information that he defeated Memento-something, an enemy. If she read through the news log, she might be able to find him in the large world of 『CtG』.

Sakura then stood up from the hot water and clenched both of her fists and hit them together.

"When it comes to this 『CtG』 or whatever, I'll do it! I'll find that guy for sure and settle my scores with him!"

From the direction of the hallway, a loud yelling voice was heard.

Part 7

At the same time.And with the same objective.

There was another girl looking for Kasugai Yuu in 『CtG』.

Sitting on her bed in the dimly lit room, there was Kodzuchi Fuyufu with the 『CtG』-use headset Ramiel in her hand.

Dressed in thin pajama, she was stretching her sloppy thin legs. The weak cooling (wind?) hitting her body right after a shower felt pleasant.

A week has nearly since Fuyufu started playing 『CtG』 she hates so much. After understanding her avatar and system controls and grasping the overall game world, she finally reaches the stage where she can begin pursuing her goal.

“.....The heck is social experiment”

Remembering Yuu’s face when he “explained” for the second time back during lunch break makes her grumble. Her face that usually lacks expression is now showing clear discontent like a child.

—What a blatant lie, he is just messing around, he is hiding something.

It’s certain that he has some big circumstances in his hand, but it’s certainly not on the same level as what Yuu said to her. That was what her intuition told her from continuing to watch over Yuu all this time; she also felt that there was something otherworldly about that Haruha kid.

And the information she gathered in 『CtG』 matches her intuition.

“I’ll catch his tail and show him a thing or two for sure”

The rain outside the window broke the silence of the dimly lit room. The fluffy buzzing sound made her recall that day in her mind.

It was the day of Yuu’s mother’s funeral. It was quiet and heavy.

Under the rain, Fuyufu had decided— she won’t lie to Yuu anymore.

“Please..... please don’t ever lie to me anymore”

A “lie”, like the time when he refused to shed any tears after his mother’s death.

Quan, the house pet, cried in a grieve-like thin voice.

Translators Notes and References

1. ↑ I'm not really sure what this is.
2. ↑ Kabuki is a classical Japanese dance-drama, and in Kabuki there is something known as Kabuki Jūhachiban or Eighteen Best Kabuki Plays, which is a set of Kabuki plays. Among the eighteen plays, there is one play called Uwanari (鰻) which is like what described above.
3. ↑ The kanji Uwanari (鰻) consist of the Kanji for man (男) in the middle of the two kanji for woman (女), I'm pretty sure you get what he meant.
4. ↑ Possibly about World War II.
5. ↑ Why stocking? I hear you wondering. Don't ask me, I had no idea as well.
6. ↑ Originally, Ikemen Spirit
7. ↑ He said Sankyu, aka in English.....
8. ↑ Both word for Kindness and Inductiveness start with 優 which rhyme with Yuu's name although his name is written in different Kanji (遊).
9. ↑ The "idiot" here in Japanese is Suttokodokkoi (スットコドッコイ) which means "foolish, stupid, or idiot thing". This word later repeated by Nogi and Rokkaku Hasuko.
10. ↑ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akabeko>.
11. ↑ Not literally idiot. The "idiot" here is from the word Suttokoi (スットコイ) of Suttokodokkoi(スットコドッコイ). Read the reference note above.
12. ↑ <https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Donburi>
13. ↑ Sara udon, literally means "plate noodles", is a native dish of Nagasaki prefecture sometimes served in school meals at grade schools there.
14. ↑ First Haruha is in Katakana while the second Haruha is in Kanji, most likely talking about the fact that Haruha is now in real world.
15. ↑ Read it yourself: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planck_scale
16. ↑ This: 人
17. ↑ Hit Point. I don't have to explain this right?.
18. ↑ or big sis.
19. ↑ Nabe = Pot. You get what I mean (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabemono>)

20. ↑ A type of blouse jacket. Picture for reference:
<http://i.imgur.com/HngcihW.jpg>
21. ↑ In case it's not obvious enough. It's type of card child has to show to others in case they get lost or separated from their parents.
22. ↑ A kind of Boxing move
23. ↑ Most likely a character from Street Fighter series, Edmond Honda, a sumo wrestler
24. ↑ "Like a goldfish poo" means "a person who follow his/her friend all the way". Something like when a girl says "I want to go to toilet" and others be like "Then I'll too"
25. ↑ イフメソツド, possibly 「IFメソツド」 which is a counseling concept. I'm not really sure what this is.
26. ↑ A pro-wrestling move.
27. ↑ Read Volume 1 for more insight.

Chapter 2: Santa Sangre

Part 1

It felt like being in the sea of emerald green. It was the color of the sunlight passing through the transparent leaf, shining down from the cloudless sky shrouded by only the tree branches. Depending on the location, the color would change to blue, red or green, and strengthen the effect of elemental magic that shared its color.

“—In green places like this, wind and thunder elemental magic will be stronger.”

They were in the square right before the entry point, the church, which was one of 10 worlds in 『CtG』. While looking up at the spreading sea of leaves above them, Clamp began to describe this bizarre sight.

—This is a world sphere with mysterious plants throughout the land, “Wizards’ Glaive”

It was a world of magicians where most magic-classified skills were banned. However, it was filled with difficult quests and dungeons that could only be cleared by mastering those remaining available magic spells.

The light passing through the layer of tree leaves gave many complex shades of green depending on the thickness of the leaves. As a consequence, it hypnotically attracted visitors. The world itself was literally a natural kaleidoscope of a fantasy world.

Kasugai Yuu’s avatar was Clamp, the adventurer. The group, which he was the leader of, had arrived to one of the town in Wizards’ Glaive, Raiankarydi.

Clamp was wearing swordsman-like equipment, just like he did in Dragons’ Glaive, but instead of armor that favored physical defense, he was dressed with a cape. He was a bit depressed after being compared to as “A Snufkin^[1] but without the coolness” by Mifa.

And while looking at Clamp's whole body from head to toe,

"Ahahaha, Daddy turned green. Like a poison slime."

Haruha let out cheerful peals of laughter.

"But Haruha, it's the same with you."

He looked down at his daughter as he pointed it out. For her, she was wearing the same equipment when she fought in Gunman's Glaive, but by dyeing it black through color edit, she now looked a lot like a small young witch. Naturally, Haruha, the witch girl, was also lightly dyed green.

"It's true! We all green, we all great!"

While saying it like a slogan, Haruha rubbed together her 'green' hands. For Haruha, who was born from inside the game, her avatar in this world was literally her 'real' body. She was able to move her body more smoothly compared to the time she was Kasugai Haruha in real world.

From behind, someone placed a hat on Haruha's head. It was a large brim pointy hat often used by witches in fairy tales. Looking through expanded mode, he saw the tag 『The Wicked (replica)』 marked on it.

"Ehehe, they sell this area-limited item here so I bought it"

The one who bashfully said that was Mifa, who, all of sudden, had bought the hat in question out of impulse from a nearby stall.

Mifa is Miharu's avatar, but compared to Clamp and Haruha who behaved similarly to their own self in reality, Mifa behaved very differently, giving a very different impression.

Her blonde hair blended in with the sunlight passing through the canopy as if she was like an idol on stage. Furthermore, her avatar's bright expression and lively way of talking was nothing like the real Miharu. At first, Yuu was puzzled by the gap between Mifa and Miharu.

Today in particular, she edited her costume black to match Haruha's own black and it made her look more mature..... somewhat.

Haruha loosely opened her mouth and looked up at Mifa.

“Mommy, you look like NP Witch.”

NP Witches were computer-controlled witches and one of the enemies appearing in the game. They wore a black mantle and the matching pointy hat which “really” fit their real life counterpart.



“That’s right, you look cute, Haruha”
– Clamp

“We’re match now”
–Mifa

“Haruha look like a witch right?”
– Haruha

“This is a world sphere with mysterious plants throughout the land, “Wizards’ Glaive”— The world of magicians.”

“We’re match now.”

Mifa then put on the same hat and 《Equip》 it. With this, the hat would never fall off on its own unless she received above a certain level of shock or deprivation effects.

Haruha 《Equip》 the triangle hat as well and checked her own appearance through the status window in front of her —In there, she’s not dyed green—. Comparing her image with Mifa, she blushed. Whether in game nor not, the girl

loved to imitate her parents.

Then Clamp who had just perused the map screen and confirmed their current location suddenly got pulled from below.

“Daddy, Daddy, Haruha looks like a witch right?”

“That’s right, you look cute, Haruha”

‘Ehehe’ giggled Haruha as she produced a smile, and then returned to Mifa in a good mood.

“He said we cute, Mommy!”

“Eh? Ah.....”

They unconsciously looked at each other— Clamp and Mifa couldn’t say anything.

Yuu did think that Mifa in a witch outfit looked cute, but to say it that bluntly to the person face-to-face would have given off a very different meaning compared to the meaning when said to Haruha.

They had been able to comfortably talk to each other during the time when they only knew each other through their avatars over the internet. But now both of them are living in the same place.

The first to open their mouth was Mifa. She covered her eyes with her hat and stammered,

“Tha, thank you.....”

“No..... unn, well...”

.....

“—W-Well then! What is the thing we’re trying to investigate here?”

“Aah. They were often witnessed in the forest in this area—”

Knowing full well that she just blatantly tried to change to topic, Clamp gladly followed suite. In reality, their reason to be here wasn’t just to play around.

“They’re 『Ghosts』 that aren’t recognized as either player or NPC.”

Part 2

Over a week had passed since the day Miharu started to go to the same school as Yuu. It was also the day Haruha met Kanna Sakura. Their lives began to change little by little. That was, the nature of their uncommon daily life.

While preparing for the upcoming test, Yuu visited the nearby arcade during his way home from school at least once a day. Somehow he felt the need to be Kanna Sakura's opponent, but it's not that simple to meet her again.

Despite going to the same place and at the same time when they first met, he couldn't find her. All he got was just the feeling of guilt when he discovered the name SKR, a Push Yasokichi-user, in the game's high score list.

Why did he search for her like this? It might have been because, Sakura from that time— looked like himself before he met Haruha and Miharu. A game was not something to be played with such a grieving face; he wanted to say to that face of her.

And commenting on Yuu's behavior,

"I don't mind about the thing with that middle school student, but what are you going to do with that Kodzuchi-girl?The two of you look awkward in front of each other."

The one who said that was Mifa.

Miharu tend to refrain from saying too much, but in 『CtG』and as Mifa, she showed no hesitation to say what she wanted to say. To add on top of that, she didn't even try to hide her hostility towards Fuyufu. And yet, she was always interested about Yuu and Fuyufu's development in their relationship.

(Kugimiya-san did say "I'll support you", but.....)

Miharu herself had no intention in getting along with Fuyufu. It also appeared that Fuyufu felt the same way. In short, they had bad chemistry with each other. They always glared at each other every time they met in the hallway or on the way to school. Unfortunately, Yuu was in a delicate position where he couldn't

support either of them.

His childhood friend who had always been by his side from afar versus his “daughter’s mother” whom he 《Married》 inside the virtual world. For Yuu..... having either of them as enemy was not an option.

That’s why— all he can do was to prevaricate the topic.

“Like always. But, that’s okay. Being suspected by her..... is common practice”

“Mmnnn.....”

Mifa appeared to show a lack of interest. At first glance, she appeared to be acting normally in front of Yuu despite his relationship with Fuyufu..... but, somehow she seemed to be regretting something.

“More than that, are you going well with the class? From what I see, you seem to be liked a lot.”

“.....Somehow they recognize me as a romance master..... Ah, I’ve restored your point up to 50.”

He had absolutely no idea what she meant by that, and she said nothing more. Miharu herself appeared to be occupied by her weird title.

It seemed that she got along well with the girls in the class, but it looked like she still didn’t have a friend whom she could talk to casually.

“Haruha is stronger than a raging whale!”

“This is the pulling overarm throw^[2]!”

“Kyaaaa~~”

Meanwhile, Haruha was happily doing sumo practice with the NPC Nanny, Payakino. Haruha happily screamed as she was thrown by Payakino, the giant mushroom stuffed doll. It’s Haruha’s favorite activity recently. (By the way, ever since Hajime hurt her hip from playing sumo with Haruha, doing it in real world is now forbidden.)

“Next time Haruha meets Sakura-chan, Haruha will show her Haruha’s sumo skill!”

“First of all, you need to solidify the basic and enhance your skill.”

For the sake of her reunion with Sakura, Haruha was fired up. She sure liked her a lot despite having only played for a few hours together. Although, it's still a mystery as to why she called her Sumo-san.

Believing the person whom she only played with once as a friend— such childish innocent thought. Her belief that she will meet Sakura again reminded Yuu of his own childhood self that he had forgotten.

(Since when have I become this tactless.....?)

Right now, his only friend whom he could talk to comfortably was just Kouta. It's not like he wanted to become popular, but he felt that his current lifestyle forced him to avoid others.

(No wonder Fuyufu got irritated.)

Ever since he started taking care of Haruha, he was able to view things objectively by himself.

And in the middle of such fresh and peaceful days, that man had appeared out of the blue.

Niuro Mansei, a high-ranked researcher of “Human Equilibrium Institute” who used 『CtG』 to create Haruha and entrusted her to Kasugai household in the real world. He's a mysterious slim man in black who wore fake smiles below his round sunglasses.

“Well, actually regarding 『CtG』, we have a potentially problematic topic at hand.”

While sitting straight and entwining his hands together, he brought out the ominous topic. He was well aware that he made Miharu his enemy during his last “favor”, so he came in when Miharu and Haruha went out for shopping.

“.....So what do you want by telling us this?”

“Well well, please listen to me first. You will know soon enough.”

Niuro remained calm, but his forcefulness wouldn't take no as an answer. He had easily crushed his escape option of saying “I don't want to get involved so I won't listen”.

“For starters, the first problem. It is something reported by the players.

In the vicinity of Raiankarydi in Wizards’ Glaive, we’re hunting an unknown group.”

“Unknown.....?”

“Yes. Their appearance is that of a normal avatar, but when inspected through extended mode, the texts were all garbled up and we couldn’t get anything.

—Aah, by the way do you happen to know what this is about?”

“Why do you ask me that?”

“Aren’t you the best person to ask about 『CtG』 bugs?”

“.....I don’t intent to be one, and I don’t know any such bug.”

“As expected, this is quite a problematic matter. They are neither a player’s avatar nor an NPC, an existence uncontrollable by the system. We have the duty to immediately clarify their identity and to find out what created them. You understand why right?”

Of course. If such unknown existence went rampant in large quantities and interfere with the game’s controls, it will certainly harm Haruha who must periodically log-in into 『CtG』 to sustain her life. However, Yuu yelled in an irritated voice,

“Then..... why do you tell me all of this? You people should just—”

“Yes. About that, I’ll explain to you after I talk about one more thing.

Well then, the second problem. This was brought up by the user’s family, not the user themselves. I wonder how to say this..... it’s more abstract compared to the previous one.

Their personality changed. Immediately after playing 『CtG』”

“.....It’s not just their imagination?”

“The changes are extreme. One day their personality changes all of the sudden. And each one of them changed differently, there are those who become more cheerful and there are those who became gloomier. Amongst them, there was also a kid who had locked himself inside his room for 3 years suddenly

becoming sociable.

We've received over 10 reports of these cases, and considering the potential crisis we may have to face, we can no longer ignore this."

"You are saying 『CtG』can modulate a person's mental state?"

"Needless to say, normally it can't. In order to prevent itself from making any chemical changes to the user's brain or spinal cord, Ramiel is equipped with many layers of safety mechanisms.

But still, Kasugai-kun. You know there are exceptions for this."

"Memento Coppelia....."

A personality created in the virtual world like Haruha. Memento was a prototype who failed in the real world and ended up with a corrupted mental state. She had the ability to bring physiological impact to the player's real body in the real world. However, she was eventually defeated by Clamp.

With her ability to bring divergence in an instant, she managed to kill Yuu once.

"That's right, an ability that Hadzar acquired on their own— we call it the Absolute Unit Evolution^[Man-Mod].

In Memento's case, she activated the activity of the person's mirror neurons, and exploited their communication strengthening ability and caused them to experience strong reactions towards pain. Just like hers, if it's something that causes a non-existing phenomenon then there was a possibility it was able to bypass the safety lock.

Therefore, there is a possibility of the existence of another team experimenting Hadzar possessing a Man-Mod that we are not aware of."

—Finally.

Finally he got to the heart of what it was about.

"Are you planning to have Haruha face another Hadzar?"

Only a Hadzar could defeat other Hadzars as both possessed overwhelming fighting power in the virtual world. Therefore, he had used Haruha to deal with Memento. But.

“The one who defeated Memento was me. If there is a need to fight other Hadzars, from the start, you should have let me—”

The boy tried to place his hand on his chest, but the man in glasses stopped him.

“Just calm down for a second. It does not necessarily mean you have to fight. First of all, we’re still not sure whether it’s the work of a Hadzar or not, and it’s not like all Hadzar is like Memento, we might be able to talk this out.

For the time being, we ask you to investigate this matter.”

“It doesn’t have to be us right.....”

“—Sure, we can just leave the management to our staff. You’re right. However, we have a promise to be not be directly involved in cases with a Hadzar’s involvement. On other hand, people from the institute are forbidden to blindly interfere until we confirm the involvement of a Hadzar.

Therefore, we request Kasugai-kun and others, who’s on the boundary line of general users, to investigate this case.”

Niuro Mansei adjusted his sunglasses with his middle finger and it casted off a faint — very faint, close to non-existence — smile for the very first time.

“Do you understand?”

Part 3

—Like hell I know you bastard! He thought, but it's the truth that he has no option but to accept his proposal if he wanted to consider Haruha's safety. And even if it's not, it doesn't change the fact that this is urgent. Haruha should be a precious sample for Niirō, but even so he still tried to have her fight Memento despite her questionable chance of winning..... In the end, Yuu and Miharu had no option but to protect her by themselves.

Later he talked about it with Miharu and she replied with "Just investigating right....." while making a frown and agreed.

As he reminisced the event, Clamp was walking through inside the forest where the "ghosts" were reported to be seen. As he had expected, the landscape was stained by the green light passing through the semi-transparent leaves clouding^[3] above. As he pushed through the cotton-like soft undergrowth, he advanced to the center coordinates of the sightings.

It was like a mirror maze where all you see are just trees, leaves, and grass, but fortunately this is a game world. No worries about getting lost since you can just simply open your map and check your current location there. Even their footsteps are recorded.

Throughout the Wizards' Glaive, Yellow Brick which is a shining yellow brick road spreads across the place. Just by walking on that road, your Spirit Point^[Skill Point], which you use to use skill and magic skill, recovery rate will increase, therefore this in this World Sphere where the usage of magic is essential, most adventurers chose to travel on this road.^[4]

However, the "Ghost" Niirō talked about seems to be hiding deep in the woods, far away from the road, which enforces the strangeness in the situation.

In such a sinister forest,

""Payapayapayapaya Gyafun♪ Gyafun♪

Toady's lunch is... what, hoi♪ (hai♪)""

There was the happy and carefree singing voices of Mifa and Haruha under the sky of the sea of tree.

““After the rain, the mushrooms go boom♪ (boom♪)”^[5]

While holding Mifa’s hand, Haruha pushed her tempo and loudly sang, following Mifa. Haruha loves to imitate Miharumifa, and she used the guitar case she got from Miharum when Miharum ran away from home and made it into her toy box. Among all thing, to sing along with her is her favorite. With a strong infectious smile, she lightened Clamp’s stiff legs.

By the way, the song that they sang was 『Ugo☆Ugo Fever』. It’s a funky soulful song written by Payakino by making full use of its songwriting routine.

At first glance, they look like a pair of mother and daughter witches —Or more like, sisters— enjoying a picnic. But, set aside Haruha, Mifa was actually exercising her skill. She used magic using a singing voice called 《Curse Song》.

《Curse Song》 is about singing to match the fixed songs —It doesn’t matter what the lyrics are, but like a Karaoke rating system, depending on your voice volume and intonation, the effects subtly changes— as such, the desired effect achieved from simply singing is divided into two types. The one Mifa was currently using is the latter, to detect presences depending on the range of her voice—

“Nn!《Soundwave Search/Song》^[Active Sonar] reacted to something!”

Mifa and Haruha’s carefree song abruptly stopped and changed into a tense voice.

“This reaction..... large numbers of people are currently fighting!”

Following the direction of Mifa’s line of sight, he saw a flash on the other side of the dense forest.

Just like what Mifa said, the plaza-like woodland they arrived at was filled with lots of people. However, the sight in front of them weren’t exactly what you would call a fight.

It was like a dispute between same or equal numbers of people —around one, two, to three people—, if you look at it like that it looked like unilateral

violations.

Both sides have strange appearances. Those on the winning side were wearing matching masks and cloaks that covered their whole body, making it hard to distinguish between them. The only obvious characteristic distinguishing them was just the numbers drawn on their mask.

Meanwhile those on the losing side each wore different individual mantles and a hood that covered their faces. The only common point between them was just their covered faces.

While the masked man went forward, defending themselves from the swordsman's counterattack who was aided by defense magic, they overwhelmed the hooded group with magic attacks by the rear guard.

The hooded group tried to do the same and made a counterattack but the gap between their cooperation was far too huge. The attacking big swordsman was hit by a lighting attack and defeated; his legs were instantly cut off and rolled on the ground. And the bloody letters Cut Off! Stained the green world.

As he watched over the battle from a distance under the shade of a tree, Clamp leaked a puzzled voice.

“.....Bingo, it's the 『Ghosts』. But, what is the meaning of this?”

Once he changed his vision to AR mode, he abruptly reached half of his goal. They're the strange group with garbled name and simple status window. The problem is,

“The losing side is the one with corrupted display..... a bit unexpected”

As Mifa just said, the one getting defeated easily was the “Ghosts”. No matter how you look at it, the suspicious ones were those people in masks, but at very least they're just normal players as seen through the display.

To be honest, it felt a bit anticlimactic. In the worst case, he thought that he would have to face a group of Hadzar. The movements of the people wearing hoods have too many individual differences and none of them surpass the power of a normal human player.

In that sense, the masked group's bizarrely rounded tactics^[Manuver] was way

more eerie.

(.....Are they just a simple bugged NPC or a player with a broken display? If that is the case I would like to leave it to the administrator, but..... who the heck are those people in masks?)

It's hard to decide. At this rate, the hood group will likely be massacred, but it's hard to imagine one will die simply from being killed in game, so it's not a big problem. It won't become a reason for Clamp and his family to intervene.

As he felt Mifa's gaze of agreement, he will decide their next move— But then.

“Aa.....”

The Sound of a small voice from the side. It wasn't Mifa. Along with Mifa, Clamp lowered his line of sight.

It was Haruha watching the masked group curiously. But now, the only thing in her eyes was one of the members of the hooded group. No, that hooded person was hit and blown away by the masked group's attack, and she was looking into that person's face.

That face.

That was the face of Kanna Sakura, the person Yuu had been looking for a while now.

The moment she realized that, Haruha's figure had already disappeared from their protection.

The masked man marked with the number 『4』 had a duty to carry.

As the man who had mastered large varieties of magic attacks, he was the rearguard and attacked with 《Electric Arrow》^[Bolt Dash], a magic attack with excellent power and a fast cooldown that surpassed its cost performance. Its only weakness was that it had a short and narrow attack range, but he compensated for that by having the vanguard swordsman to trump the enemy. As a result, his enemies amusingly fell onto the ground.

Once again, the lightly-armored girl was blown away and her hood fell. It revealed the face of their enemy. Naturally, it's a familiar face, and the man

delivered the final blow without hesitation.

They are “Ghosts”^[6]. An existence that must be erased.

However.

“Saaaakuuuuraaaa-chaaaaan~~!!!”

The targeted girl was pushed down by a little girl who jumped at her and the man’s light bullet missed its target and hit a tree behind them.

『4』 wasn’t the only one who was taken aback by the strange intrusion. Everyone who participated in the fight stopped their movement. A kid appeared all of a sudden in the midst of combat. Not only was her presence out of place, but the fact that they didn’t notice her until she approached them confused them.

“You, you’re... Haruha, from that time?”

From the way she called her name, it also appeared that the “Ghost” also knew about the kid. Meanwhile the kid rubbed her cheek against the girl’s breasts as if she wanted to crawl into them.^[7]

“We finally meet! Haruha has mastered Sumo!”

She uttered nonsense, but one thing for sure, it’s okay to ignore what she just said. No matter how you look at it, she’s just a child who wasn’t even 10 years yet, if that was the case, she should be a Travel PC who can’t interfere with combat.

My attacks won’t be interfered with by her, so I can just ignore her and mop the floor with these “Ghosts” — 『4』 thought. Naturally, the other masked men thought the same.

The masked swordsman 『22』 then swung his sword at the “Ghost” who was occupied with the little girl. There is no need for him to aim in this position.

“Wait! That kid is—”

The sound of a voice was heard from afar. This time, the presences were clear. Two people were running desperately pushing through the grass. They’re a swordsman-like guy and a girl who was wearing the same triangle hat as the

earlier kid. Looking through the AR Mode, their names and simple stats were displayed; they're just common players.

"I beg you, please back off for a moment! Don't lay a hand on that kid!"

The witch-like girl was begging, but the words from the guy after her was a sincere urgent warning.

"Do you all want to get killed!?"

『22』 ignored him and swung his sword. But, his blade missed its target.

His wrists that were unprotected by his gloves started sporting blood. Because of that, he lost his strength and his attack missed. Since when did he get cut, both 『4』 who was slightly away from him and naturally 『22』 himself had no idea.

If only they knew, they would have at the very least, put more effort into their defense.

But in the end 『22』's body was ripped to shreds and he went down on his knee above a pool of blood that was flowing from his own body. If you got seriously injured in 『CtG』 you will continue to recover like a vampire in an anime as long you still have Endurance Point^{Hit Point} left, but you will still lose your strength temporarily when you bleed from injuries on your vital points. And then.

His fallen head was hit with a roundhouse kick, as his head twisted in a strange direction 『22』 turned into a Corpse^[Mannequin] in an instant. Under Ramiel specification, no matter how many HP you have left, if your brain or spinal cord was damaged and can no longer maintain its connection, it will be treated as a game over.

It just felt too unsatisfying, hollow, and shallow to call it a fight— like an unfortunate accident that is overwhelmingly common. Like a pointless disaster.

In other word, just an unreasonableness commonly referred to as fate.

The one who accomplished that was the little girl who released herself from the “Ghost” girl all of a sudden— the kid known as Haruha.

She indifferently swung the knife stained with 『22』’s blood and tainted the green ground with red droplets. Seen through the shadow from underneath the brim of her hat, was the glow of her pupils.

Then, she turned her back to the confused the “ghosts”, and spoke to the masked men.

“Hey”

It was said in a light voice, lacking of any kind of hostility or malice.

“Why did you hurt Sakura-chan?”

『CtG』 is a game that allowed battle between players, so there was nothing wrong— to answer like that is common sense. But, 『17』 who was in front of Haruha did not answer. Because it would be a lie. That’s why, he gave an honest answer.

“They are not human.

They are not supposed to be he——”

He failed to finish, 『17』’s tongue was pierced with a blade deep into the base of his tongue and into his mouth, sewn down to his throat. Haruha who threw that knife then climbed up 『17』’s bended body like a flight of stairs then produce a red light ball with her left hand and hurled it into 『17』’s open mouth.

It was 《Exploding Fireball》^[Fireball], elemental magic that will create an explosion upon landing. Its power is not a big deal, but when it explodes in narrow spaces, it will create an impact that was multiple times stronger.

Before 『17』’s back landed on the ground, he had already turned into a mannequin. His head swelled up all over the place and its insides was blown to shreds, there was no trace left of its former shape.

“Y.....you, are you really that kid from that time.....?”



After she expressionlessly defeated the second guy, Haruha faced the “ghost” girl who spoke in an idiotic voice, smiled.

“Haruha, is strong in this game”

—This kid is nuts. And, apparently he had angered that strange kid.

Under their united awareness, all the vanguard swordsmen gathered around the girl and 『4』 and the other magicians shoot 《Bolt Dash》 magic all at once. Her left and right are blocked; there was no way for Haruha to avoid the incoming 《Bolt Dash》.

That was what it should have been. But.

The next moment, the swordsmen on Haruha’s left side were struck by knives on their thighs and their posture broke, and the swordsmen on the right side wondered— what just happened, all of them were defeated, their calves were torn, their waists were pierced, and their throats were slit.^[8]

The enemy’s agility was not unusually high or anything. Just that her swift movements, passed through the gap of his senses, exactly like that of a well-executed magic trick..... as such.

All the lightning bolts lost its small target and disappeared once it passed its maximum range. The small Haruha’s figure disappeared into the grass like a snake. Then the second time she emerged, she pierced one of the bent swordsman’s throat with a knife and pulled out another knife from her thigh, then she hit the pommel of the knife that was in his throat with a palm heel strike and further added to the number of mannequin she made.

“Kugh.....”

He instinctively groaned, 『4』 switched his skill. It’s a magic that took longer to chant^[charge] than the one he had used earlier, but the rectilinear and poor to changes 《Bolt Dash》 won’t be able to catch that kid.

Other masked men connected to his will concentrated their sword and magic attacks on Haruha in order to buy time.

There was no need for words in their cooperation. Their absolute trust and genuine camaraderie makes a world without lies possible.

Haruha had shown extraordinary poise so far, but as expected she couldn't handle the simultaneous attacks from all sides and gradually retreated as she stained the chasing masked swordsmen with blood.

Meanwhile 『4』's skill finally charged. It's a high-level attack 《Lightning Whip Attack》[Lightning Whipper] he mastered when he was still adventuring alone. As the name implied, it's a magic that created a lightning whip and wrapped itself onto the enemy. Not only does it have a wide area of effect, no matter how small or agile the target was, it's impossible to avoid.

It rests on his hand, the band of lighting released the sound of heated oil. Simultaneously his allies retreats from the rays, and then he swung it up.

“Nngh!”

Along with a silent yell he swung it at Haruha. Above the young girl, the phantasmagoric lighting approach!

That moment, Haruha.

Thrust a knife into the stomach of the falling swordsman—

And threw it.

Naturally, it wasn't, the swordsman's body.

It was something thin, long, crimped, and wavy. That's why it entangled with the lighting whip, and while emitting a nasty burning smell it sealed the whip's movement. While entangled with the lighting, it was thrown in a rough and unexpected direction.

—Human's guts, are said to have five times the length of the person's height.

“Wha.....!?”

Seeing his trump card avoided in the most unexpected way, for a moment, 『4』 couldn't decide on the next move to take. He might have been able to hit Haruha if he shook it off by force. But, he failed to do that.

—Through the gap he made to use 《Lightning Whipper》, the triangle hat little girl approached with frightening speed. Stepping on 《Fireball》that she casted, she shot forward through the air, she used the recoil of the explosion and came at him like a storm caused by devil.

The last thing 『4』 recognized was the gooseflesh chill coming from his entire body when the tip of the knife that was thrust through the eye hole of his mask hit the surface of his eyeball.

Around the same time. Clamp and Mifa who ran into the battlefield had failed to prevent Haruha's recklessness.

But they were also attacked by the masked swordsman. It was just one person; she had ignored Haruha from the very beginning, like a boxer, using a leaning posture she rushed at Clamp.

The number marked on her mask is 『44』. Looking through AR Mode, her avatar name is Yusra, gender ♀^[Woman]. She must be aiming for parity since her level is equal to Clamp.

“Wait, we have no intent to.....”

Fight, but even if he said that she wouldn't listen. After all, at that time Haruha had already slaughtered scores of the masked men. There is no way she would spare Clamp and Mifa who were clearly connected to Haruha

Sure enough, no questions asked, the masked Yusra attacks. Unlike other masked men, she was not using swords or magic, but rather her fists.

Clamp managed to avoid it, but his cheek was hit and the blood splashing from the impact took form; *Graze Hit !*. It was a fighting skill known as 《Meteor Fist》^[Knuckle Shoot], it created bullet of fists in succession. It has speed equal to a professional boxer's jab, there is no other way to avoid it other than using his intuition to work out where the bullet was aimed according to the angle it was fired.

“Kugh.....”

There is no room for negotiation as expected. And against a dangerous opponent such as her, holding back meant death. And it's not like he can log-out leaving Haruha alone in this situation.

(There is no way I can leave Haruha all alone!)

By the time he noticed he was told off by Hajime. “Well well, if you feel danger

I can bring you back here” — and such. Do you want to let other player get killed by Haruha!?

He clicked his tongue inside his mind and unsheathed Single-edged Sword^[Scaramax] from his waist— at the same time, he blocked the second fist with the fuller part of his sword. Yusra’s fist seen up close, her shining red gauntlet cracked.

As it is, Clamp and Yusra began a fierce face-off at close range. They’re both too close to each other for Mifa to enter the fight or provide support. Mifa spoke from afar.

“Aaagh come on! What should I do here!? Do you want an assist song or something?”

“Mifa, you stop Haruha and learn about the situation from that middle school kid! There is no way of telling whether it’s good to fight them or not like this!”

The only thing certain here was that the avatar who had the face of Kanna Sakura is Sakura herself. That would explain her reaction when she saw Haruha. Why she’s a “Ghost”, and why she was being attacked by suspicious masked men, as long they don’t know why they won’t able to settle this matter.

They are not “Husband and Wife” for months for nothing, Mifa immediately understood and headed towards the rampaging Haruha. Yusra did not chase after her. For some reason, she aimed for Clamp alone from the very beginning.

“—You!!”

She took a back step away from the barrage of fist, and shoot through the repelled attack. Just like her opponent’s, it’s a high speed piercing skill that is impossible to perform manually. Either to avoid or block, it forces her opponent to break their posture and retreat — such a underhanded trick

“Uuowaa!?”

And he fell along with the goofy scream of his own. His arm was taken, and he was thrown with what you would call a Judo one-armed shoulder throw. Being hit with an unexpected counterattack, he was helplessly thrown to the ground.

The reason why he couldn’t expect that was because skills with specification of

“Once the requirement is met and activated, you will be able to ignore the law of physics and automatically catch your opponent and throw him/her” does not exist in the game command. Throwing technique skill-specific preliminary action—taking a fixed stance— did not occur. It was completely manual, in other words, he was thrown by the player’s martial arts.

Getting hit by weapon-less manual action won’t decrease his HP, but he will still receive the impact from it. Receiving a nasty blow on his back, he tried to wake up while enduring his clogged breath, and once again faced Yusra who charged at him with semi-auto high speed strike.

That time Clamp— smiled.

(She is amazing! This fighting style, not even mother who created the system would possibly expect this!)

A hybrid of the game system skill’s unrealistic high speed strike and flexible martial arts the player herself mastered in the real world. She mixed those two high level skills in harmony. Like a new type of martial arts.

(Discovery! This is a discovery! With this, one can revolutionize the game even if they aren’t one of the developers! Furthermore, her Kinetic visual acuity and reflex are way beyond normal level. She can become an amazing 『CtG』 player!)

Wearing the face of a suspicious person, while dedicating a feeling of gratitude he was driven by the desire of wanting to get beaten by her. No, he’s not a pervert. For him, she is the benefactor who thought him a “Way to enjoy this game” that he didn’t know. Kasugai Yuu’s awareness of “Must play through 『CtG』” is that strong.

But, he can’t stay happy from finally meeting a worthy opponent forever. Right now Clamp is not a irresponsible^[Solo] adventurer, depending on the identity of those “Ghosts” it possibly won’t be a play^[Game] anymore.

“I’m sorry but..... I must go to where that kid is. I’ll have to defeat you now”

He tightened his expression and provocatively declared. Yusra remain unshaken and rushed in. Clamp swung his sword with his right hand—

And he cut off his own left wrist without hesitation.

“Kugh!?”

From the wound on his wrist an excessive amount of blood gushed out. The splashes hit Yusra’s mask, and the blood formed the word Self Hit!, taking away her vision.

Clamp came close to Yusra who reflexively stopped her movement, and struck her mask with the pommel of his sword. Furthermore, as she staggered and bent down he brutally kicked her. He then stepped on Yusra’s shoulder as she lay on her back, and pressed the point of his sword to her neck.

By that time his left wrist’s bleeding turned black and started recovering while consuming his HP. He was able to retain his consciousness from the rapid blood lost, and he delivered words of apologize unfitting for the current situation.

“Haruha..... our child, I apologize for what she has done. I’m sorry. And do me a favor, shall we make a deal here?”

Yusra, the 『44』, ignored his offer. But, for the first time she spoke. Her voice was dry, not showing any trace of her feeling.

“Like always..... that crazy fighting style of yours”

Certainly it was a “crazy” way to fight. Even though senses of pain is decreased in this virtual world, one would usually feel hesitant to cut oneself just to take away their opponent’s vision. It’s exactly because Yuu, who could separate this amazingly real virtual world as “just a game”, this can be done without preparing in advance. However.

“Like always, you mean.....?”

Without answering, Yusra took away her mask. And what was under the easily taken off mask was.

The face of Kanna Sakura that he saw earlier.

“Eh.....?”

Bewildered, he instinctively pulled his sword. “Yusra” did not miss that chance and held the point of his sword with her gauntlet and stood up, as expected while he was still being hesitant she took distance.

Then once again Yusra created a fighting pose— then lowered her arm. When

she looked at it, all the masked men were already wiped out by Haruha's tyranny. Those several remaining then retreated. Haruha was held by Mifa, it appeared she was stopped from chasing after them.

".....I will back off for now"

Yusra then followed the other masked men and retreated with a back step. Although it was muffled by the mask, her voice was that of Sakura. But, her scarce voice intonation brought a severe sense of discomfort

"Again, let's play again"

And, eventually.

Until her figure disappears from Extend^{AR} vision effective range, Clamp just stood there stunned.

Part 4

“So.....How was it?”

“Well..... I think my grades will drop more than what I got in the intermediate test.”

One dawn after the bizarre event at the green sea of trees— Kasugai Yuu and Kugimiya Miharuru were taking a rest in their classroom.

After that incident, all the “ghosts” had vanished from their sight while they were unable to decide on whether to go after the masked men or not. They searched for them for two hours, but in the end, they got no luck and it was already midnight outside by the time Hajime brought them back to real world.

After that while listening to the sounds of her breathing, Yuu carried the half-asleep Haruha to bed. Then, he instinctively held her lonely-looking hand which resulted into him end up studying on the bed because she wouldn't let go of his hand. Thanks to all that, this youthful high school student seriously lacked some sleep.

The first day of year-end test. For whatever reason, the subject that day was math which was too much for the current two to handle. Miharuru who had just transferred to the school, received some “consideration”. But only to some degree.

“You sure have it nice, Kasugai-kun. You're good at science right?”

“Well, not much. At least not, much compared to those who actually are.”

Thanks to the fact that various incidents were happening in 『CtG』, his head were going nuts for constantly thinking about the masked men and numbers all at the same time. While holding down a yawn, Yuu stood up from the seat. Since it was a test day, students were free to go home in the morning.

“For dinner I'll—”

“Master~. Let's go home~”

Miharuru was about to say something to Yuu, who had already held his bag over

his shoulder. However, the moment she heard the voice she immediately shut her mouth and faced away into the opposite direction.

The voice belonged to her classmate, Tsukami Yatoko who was a cheerful girl and had taken liking to Miharuru ever since the day she transferred in. Although it was still a mystery to Yuu on why she was calling Miharuru her “Master”.

“Aah, Tsukami-san”

“Let’s study for test at 『Ruso Garden』. Nogi and Rokkaku said they will come too.”

Actually, Nogi Sunao and Rokkaku Renko were waiting right behind Tsukami. By the way, 『Ruso Garden』 is a well-known chain of restaurants famous for its delicious omelet rice.

“Forgive me. But I must go back home early today.....”

“Eehh~..... Master’s family sure is strict. Then, let’s go to the station together.”

The reality is, she just wanted to go home early just to play with Haruha. So she told her classmates that the curfew at her house is strict. Although, from what Yuu heard, Miharuru’s mother is a pretty strict person anyways. So technically speaking, it’s nothing new to her.

In reserved manner, Miharuru bowed down to Yuu. Then Tsukami raised her hand at the same time.

“Well, goodbye, Kasugai-kun.”

“Bye then, idio..... I mean, Kasugai-kun”

Since this past week, there have been many cases where girls had mistakenly called him “idiot”^[9]— Following the bizarre chain of events, same thing happened with Higuchi-sensei once who was the homeroom teacher — but Yuu decided not to let it get to him. He didn’t feel like crying because he didn’t think about it.

(Kugimiya-san sure has it tough.....)

Girls in Yuu’s class are considerably nice people. But for a shy person like Miharuru to maintain her relationship with them, it wouldn’t be easy if they learn about her secret with Yuu or Haruha.

A person with two lives. It's not that rare in this Rube Goldberg's^[10] construction of human society.

Will he thinks all that, he exits to the hallway. At that moment, he murmured the thing that been on the back of his mind since last night.

"As matter of fact, can a single person split into two?"

"Sakura" and Yusra. Not only they have the same face but somehow, "Sakura" recognized Haruha's face and Yusra recognized Yuu^[Clamp]'s. There was no way that it could be just a mere coincidence.

But by allowing them to escape, he had lost a valuable clue. However, there was still something to gain. It's something Yusra said.

『Let's meet again』

Yuu felt a strong premonition in those words.

Right in the afternoon, his legs led him to the arcade as the sun shone brightly above. But it didn't take him more than 20 minutes to reach that place from school.

The first time he came to this place was shortly after the day he was enrolled in high school. Worried about Yuu who was depressed and still hadn't blended in with the class, Kouta had dragged him there for some change of pace. Unlike the arcade where Haruha had all her money sucked dry by a crane game, this one had a net café installed at the larger stores facing the national hallway.

On the second floor of that shop, Yuu had met that girl at the competition housing corner and had achieved a narrow but a miraculous win.

"So you came."

Kanna Sakura. Her appearance was practically the same as around a week ago when she was playing with Haruha. However, she wasn't wearing her boyish jumper and instead was in a neat and clean sailor uniform.

She sat on the hard sofa that was near the entrance of the shop and then looked up at Yuu with an equally hard gaze.

After they logout from the game the other day, Hajime went to investigate about her. But from the info she got, in real world Sakura didn't show any

suspicious behavior and she'd been attending school for the past week without absence. However, that day she left school early and ended up there.

"Yesterday, you were our only clue."

"As for me, Haruha was the only clue in order for me to contact with you guys. So I waited. But then I realized that you will eventually come here anyways."

There were no signs of roughness and lacking of composer like the last time. Her voice was simply calm and polite. Although, she did sounded a bit emotionless which made him miss the cheeky side of her.

There was an aura of Discomfort. But, she really was the Yusra with whom he fought with. Therefore, his conviction deepened.

"Does that mean..... that you will tell me about what had happened, I mean about your changes, about those your 『Ghosts』 that look like you?"

"Yes. Ikui Librium wishes to meet you. That means I want to you to meet Ikui Librium. I'm certain that she will be able to grant your wish."

"Ikui..... you say?"

"She's our leader. By the way, are you alone today?"

".....I just wanted to deal with you myself."

Yuu did not wanted to have Haruha and Miharu involved in problems related to 『CtG』. His sense of duty as the son of the man who created 『CtG』 and his simple wish of not wanting to be Niuro's puppet, are what drove him to think that way.

"Is that so?"

Sakura simply replied and stood up. Then she walked inside the shop— not exactly, but she headed towards the net café and Yuu hastily followed her.



“He-Hey. What do you want?”

He was taken to a private room by Sakura who had already secured a place for both of them. It was the first time Yuu visited this type of store where it felt like a self-study space in the library equipped with a simple slide door. Just with a big sofa and table for two and a big TV connected to a laptop and—『CtG』 terminal^[Ramiel].

Sakura, who had taken a side on the sofa, had already started attaching her Ramiel. Her appearance with a headset visor and a choker looked like the attire of a slave receiving some punishment.

Since he recognized her as Haruha’s friend, he saw her as a kid. Still, he couldn’t help but be nervous being alone with her in a small space. Dressed in summer light clothes, it was evident that she was doing some sort of sport, as her faintly muscled limbs shone on the black sofa.

Regardless if she was aware of Yuu’s subtle consciousness of her or not...

“Please wear yours too and login. I’ll be waiting for you at the Raiankarydi church.”

...Sakura pressed her Ramiel’s power switch and jumped into the world of 『CtG』.

Part 5

There's no need to wait, Clamp was at Raiankarydi the last time he logout. As a result, he shows up directly inside Rainankarydi church.

The one who faced him unsurprised was the girl he fought last night, Yusra. She wore a 『44』 mask with beak-like nose and a plain cloak.

Today she doesn't appear to have any intent to fight, so he decided to ask her as a greeting.

“.....That clothes, won't you get confused with your comrades?”

“There aren't much people who would mistake an index finger as middle finger.”

She replied with ambiguous answer. That's certainly true, and come to think of it he's not really sure how his brain can distinguish a finger from another, but as a matter of fact he can easily move his five fingers independently without trouble.

Clamp remained silent, and as a respond, Yusra quietly walked away. Without hesitation, she exits the church and traverses her way to the inside of the green forest away from the yellow brick road.

Clamp couldn't help but to feel uncomfortable being together with her in this empty forest. Even if he tries to ask her about those “ghosts” or another “Sakura”, everything will be answered once he arrives to where Ikui-something is — that's why...

“May I ask?”

Clamp asks something completely different.

“Kanna Sakura, why are you so obsessed in doing rematch with me..... Kasugai Yuu?”

It's something he had been wondering all this time. Her relentlessness wasn't normal, just like Yuu's obsession with 『CtG』.

“.....”

After a considerably long silence, she replied.

“If I’m not desperate, my lie will be exposed.”

“Lie?”

“I do Judo.”

She suddenly went out of topic, but he continues to listen in silent. As someone who was thrown by her yesterday... it’s something he wanted to know.

“When I was way younger than Haruha, I trained in a Judo dojo where my father was in when he was little. At first, I’m simply happy being able to move my body and roll people who were bigger than me, and turned out that it seemed I have talent and everyone praised me and was proud of me because of that. Eventually, I start to think I’m special among those in elementary school level.

Then, as special person, I must work hard to meet others’ expectation.

As a result, blessed with luck, I was able to win in a national tournament individual match when I was still a freshman in middle school.”

“Amazing.....”

“—Many have said the same thing. I was happy — being expected and trying to live up to it. But, it all ended one day.

During practice, when I was tired and at lost in focus, I got injured... and it’s incurable. I was able to recover enough to the extent it won’t cause a hindrance in my daily life but, I can no longer do harsh exercise.

My life ended once at that point.”

“.....That.....”

It’s easy to line up words of denial but, it’s not a problem that a mere 16 year-old kid can say something about.

While he’s still wondering, Sakura^[Yusra] indifferently continues the story.

“For example, like getting injured from protecting a friend from bad guys, it might be nice if my injury have that kind of cool meaning. I might be able to be proud of it. But, it’s different. I just simply getting injured from practicing too

much. I felt it that time — a slight sense of discomfort, but I optimistically think it's something normal... then just from a little mistake, it broke.

I reap what I sow..... such plain, common, and nothing but a stupid careless mistake, only worth of a faint sympathy, and there's no one to blame..... just from that one failure my life crumbles, nothing left."

All Sakura wished for was a meaning in her crushed dream.

It's not like he doesn't know how she feels. Yuu himself was dumbfounded when he lost his mother all of the sudden. There were times when he thinks of intangible things like following proper procedures before dying. Lacking any of that, won't that make her death completely meaningless? He thought.

But if there is meaning in it, it is..... no, it's about Sakura now.

"What strange was, everyone else, did not change.

Even though I'm no longer the same person as I was before, my parents, my friends from school, and everyone from the dojo, still treats me the same."

"Well, doesn't that mean they're being considerate of you?"

"Yes. But, to put it the other way, it's just simply that. My near 10 years of hard work and everyone's expectation... it's not their business so it can't be helped, but my own sense of loss didn't match theirs.

I don't hate them for that. Just, my own worth that I believed in and other people's expectation is completely different from each other, my head went black. Everything that gives meaning to my life were all..... just misunderstanding."

.....Just maybe, Sakura just wanted to apologize. She wanted someone to look more heavily on her failure and blame her.

The face of Memento Coppelion who defined herself as an error and naively continues to commit sin to receive punishment flickers in his head.

"Ever since, I start to skip school and go outside playing games.

My father who was worried about me, bought me a Ramiel, and I was moved the first time I played 『CtG』. I was able to move my body as much as I want without worrying about getting injured. I was hooked for a while, but, exactly

because it's so realistic I was able to feel its faint different with reality. It clearly reminded me of the fact that I won't able to freely move my body like this in the real world. I immediately feel empty, and my play time gradually lessens.

After that, I start to play fighting game."

Finally it all connects..... But on other hand, Clamp felt oddities in her calm and objective manner of speech up to this point. Let alone the fact that it's coming from Sakura who let her emotion taken better of her in past.

Yusra's voice continues to flow indifferently.

"It has the right sense of distant. It's way different from reality, there's always someone to fight, and I was able to vigorously use my eyes and hand.

And, just like Judo, it seemed I have a talent for it. As long I figured out the rule and theory of it I'm undefeated, and people will start to praise me as I rise up my rank— to sum it up, it felt great. It was a perfect replacement.

But, for it to be a replacement is nothing but a lie.

That's why, in order to not notice that lie, in order to feel good, I desperately play games. Just like Judo that 『I must absolutely do』, by playing games with all my might, I'll be able to think the two as the same thing.

Yet, one day, I lost to a person who lacks of motivation."

"Eeerrmm..... if it's me you're talking about, it's not like I'm not motivated or anything....."

"Then that means, I lost to a both timid and frivolous person, or should I say, to a servile guy."

.....If I apologize here my image in her mind will get worse, Clamp thought, so he continue to listen silently.

"Ever since, every day I go to the arcade and do CPU fight using Push Yaoskichi, fight Push Yasokichi using Push Yasokichi, analyze Push Yasokichi, and train myself with Push Yasokichi to master Push Yaoshiki... but everything all went to waste."

"Sorry..... really, sorry....."

“It’s okay. I didn’t want to meet you either way.”

“Eh.....? But, you—”

“The truth is I was afraid of losing again. I was afraid to lose the 『replacement』 I just found. But, even so, if I run away from you, then I will notice my own lie.

I was looking for you while hoping to never meet you again.

In other words, I was lying.”

Kanna Sakura, the girl who had lost the thing she devoted her whole life to from early age, play 『CtG』 and other competitive games in order to fill the emptiness in her heart.

As result she became timid and was afraid to lose it once more, and it makes her obsessed with win and lose... and Yuu had threatened that by fluke. That’s why she must pretend to chase after Yuu.

“.....If we fight once more using my main character, you will surely win.”

Even though he doesn’t think so, he had no option but to say it.

“You’re a genius. Your great Kinect visual acuity, reflex, area grasping ability..... you have talents that normal person won’t able to beat. I won against you because I just happen to have a nice timing. One out of thousand chances, you will win.

Your skill blows and manual throwing technique was amazing. You’re.... even if you’re not obsessed with games, you’re still a person who can open the new door to unlimited possibilities.”

That’s why there is no reason for you to think so hard. That was what he wanted to say.

“Don’t mind that anymore.”

Easily.

“It’s already over, after all.”

She cut it off. As if, the story of the girl known as Kanna Sakura, never existed to begin with — she cut it off.

In fact, the current Yusra, had severed herself away from the past she has

spoken of. Her behavior and tone of voice were nothing like those coming from the girl he met before. Whatever happened, there's no way she could change so much in merely a week. Is she still even connected to her, that one more "Sakura"?

After that, Clamp finally reached the place where he can find that answer. Deep inside the sea of trees, abruptly stand, a strange building.

Its appearance, including its outer wall and floor — the entire surface of the tower were made out of transparent crystal. Inside the transparent tower up to its glass and hierarchical structures, group of players in mask lined up, and their gazes were directed at Clamp.

Although it's a bit too late, Clamp cringed.

Looking back at Clamp, Yusra present the crystal tower with her hand and gently introduces—

"Welcome. This is 『World without Lies』, Crystal Hotel.

This is our 《Crystal World》 ideal fort."

Part 6

Meanwhile, at that time—“Nnnn~..... I’m fine I said. People in the house I’m staying at and everyone at school are being nice to me.”

『Really~~? If anything happens, you can just go back home... okay? I’ll try to convince your mother. Just like with the Chorus Club, I can—』

“My mother had nothing to do with it..... Also, how about yourself, Koro-chan, didn’t you had a fight with your boyfriend, what happened after that?”

『Well well, Haru-chan..... don’t remind me please.』

“Aah~..... What was it about again?”

『Well..... he made fun of me you know. Remember Nishiyama from our class? That mantis-like girl. Recently, Sano-kun said he want to buy a new computer and so he consulted about it with that girl who seems to know a lot about it.

Then, he irritates me, when I ask Sano-kun to teach me about the computer, he instantly said “It’s impossible for you.”. That might be true, but talk about being unsociable.....』

“I SOOOOO GET THAT!!!!”

『Uwa!? What happened all of the sudden?』

“Mommy, your voice is loud.”

“All guys are like that.

.....There’s this one guy who fell in love with his childhood friend, and that childhood friend of his has a really bad personality. Also, he’s a pervert, not to mention he is also being chased by Yankee-like middle schooler, and each time I try to do something he always try to run away and leave me alone with our child. Well, of course I can’t fight as good as him or Haruha, but still!

And today, he went off somewhere without saying anything. He did sent a mail saying 『I’ll likely be late today.』 but come on, why didn’t he just call?! Doesn’t he understand that I’m worried.....!?”

『We-well Haru-chan, calm down! Okay?! 』

“.....What, you’re saying I can’t complain too? What’s up with that? *hic*”

『Half-crying all of the sudden!? Or more like, who’s he? Your boyfriend, Haru-chan?』

“He’s not! That idiot is not my boyfriend!!!”

“Mommy, what happened? Want to eat a snack?”

『That’s enough, and moreover, what’s up with that child’s voice I keep hearing!?!』

—And like that, she finished the phone call with her friend from back home while she fold the laundry in the living room.

After she vent off all of her stress, Miharu stood up along with her newly discovered determination. And without any meaning, Haruha imitates her and stood up.

Yuu who sent that plain mail still didn’t come back. He went to meet Kanna Sakura to investigate the strange phenomenon. It’s just Miharu’s intuition but she’s most likely right. He was worried about Sakura so much even before they got caught up in this incident. There’s no way he would let her off so easily.

Making doubly sure, after she make Hajime confess (with long mental stare), she managed to confirmed that Yuu checked about Sakura’s whereabouts yesterday.

Three months had passed since she became his partner in both game and real world. Reading Yuu’s mind is “easy-peasy” for her now.

He must’ve kept this secret from Miharu because he himself is not sure what’s case is all about. Occasionally, she can feel that Yuu is treating her the same way as a child^[Haruha].

It’s true that she had a hard time making a friend in school, and during the fight with Memento in 『CtG』 she didn’t do much but still, she’s at the same age as him, and she trained enough so that she can give Clamp a help. There’s no way she can allow anyone to treat her as a child anymore.

When it comes to this, all she has to do is to show her good side.

She will show it to him – Yuu, who had left her and Haruha alone to have a secret meeting with that girl. The secret of those masked men and those “ghosts” ... Miharu herself will reveal it all.

Well, it won't be that easy though.....

Part 7

—She thought. In just within an hour, Mifa had already encountered the “Ghost” group. After that, she logged in into 『CtG』 and walk her way to Raiankarydi to gather some information. It was then she heard a mosquitoes-like cry from the alley.

“Thank goodness..... those people from yesterday came.”

It was pair of hooded “Ghosts”. She saw them back in the middle of yesterdays’ commotion.

There were a group of two, a pretty big girl and a petite girl whose braids sticks out from her hood. The braids girl seemed to be a little down, hiding behind the shade of the big girl.

“We’re sorry for yesterday..... but, we must run away from the Clerics at that time.....”

But the one who actually talked was the braids girl and the girl who’s acting as her shield appeared to be frightened as she looked at Haruha who’s obediently holding hands with Mifa.

Miharu herself had no intention to bring Haruha along with her, but she insisted to follow her. It will be problematic if something like yesterday would happen again but,

『Sakura-chan, she looked like she was in trouble so Haruha must help her.』

Haruha was unwilling to back off and it’s hard to say no when she said she wanted to help her friend. Miharu herself hate it when Yuu pushes her out of the loop, so it’s impossible for her to do the same to Haruha.

In the end, she brought her along after Hajime agreed to “Even if you aren’t facing a Hadzar, I’ll log you out when fight like yesterday happens.”, but,

“Erm..... we’re in trouble actually, so we wanted to enlist the help of OKG.”

“Ooo-kee-jii?”

But the one whom the “Ghost” girls talked to wasn’t Mifa, it was Haruha who rolled her eyes over the unfamiliar word.

Thus Mifa and Haruha were taken to the “Ghosts” hideout.

They call it a hideout but it’s just a place surrounded by dense bushes that cannot be seen from outside. In the river side of the forest, inside – there were dozens of “Ghosts” waiting. Each one of them has a garbled text as seen through AR mode.

Their eyes were directed to Mifa— and moreover, to Haruha. Their glares were filled with vigilance. Mifa hold Haruha tightly with her arms.

“Errm, before anything else..... can you please explain to us what’s going on?”

She talked to the pair who brought them here. The big one is Anzu, and the braids one is Ren. But faster than either of them, the first one who opened her mouth was,

“It’s Sakura-chan!”

As if to respond to Haruha’s cheers, “Sakura” from yesterday lower her hood and reluctantly walks in. Mifa made a smile in a hurry.

“You’re Kanna Sakura-san from that time..... right?”

At the very least, her appearance and agile gestures were like hers from the other day. That “Sakura” is now standing in front of them wearing a hooded cloak and default clothes as her initial equipment.

When she first met her in the arcade she was like a sharp blade, but now, she was like a timid girl who had her fangs taken off her. She looked over Mifa and Haruha with her eyes, then she ask out of wariness.

“.....Just what are you people? At first, I thought you were just a group of weirdo playing house..... but you aren’t a normal player right?”

“But Haruha is Haruha.....?”

The first one to answer was the young girl under Mifa’s arms. Her voice was trembling. “Sakura”’s cautious eyes easily loosen up in respond.

“N-No..... I knew that, but that’s not the point.”

She’s a good girl. Just like what Haruha said longwindedly when they were in the bathroom, Kanna Sakura is a nice girl. From the fact that she did not change her avatar appearance, it’s clear that she has a simple mind. She’s practically a stranger to a Miharu^{Mifa}, but it felt like meeting an old friend to her.

“Just like what you said, we’re players with a pretty strange circumstances. But, we have no intention to fight you, Haruha’s friend. Absolutely no.

Please believe me.”

While embracing Haruha’s stiff body, she said it with outmost sincerity. Then “Sakura” whom she eye contacted with catch her breath, and looked away awkwardly.

“.....It’s okay. Regardless of the outcome, you guys helped us. Even if you’re an enemy, there is no way the situation will get worse than what it is now.

I’ll tell you what you wanted to know.”

“Thank you.”

“Sakura” then began explaining, and she directed her gaze toward Haruha.

“But still..... I suspected it, but to think that you’re that OKG..... you’re so slow^[11] back in the Arcade.”

“Oookeeegiii?”

Haruha and Mifa blinked in surprise. She heard that a little while ago... is that some kind of code?

“What is that?”

“It’s short of O.K.G^[Over Kill Girl].

People talked about it here and there..... a story about a kid who slaughtered dozens of rampaging NPC at Gunmen’s Glaive. A cheat enabling a Travel to attack, a physical debug system prepared by the administrator, things like that... it became hot topic in various bulletin board.

Well, and eventually, she’s named massacre killing little girl^[Over Kill Girl]. When

I first heard it, I thought it were just nonsense... but once I see her with my own eyes. I'm convinced, that she's certainly an OKG."

"Y-yeah..... just like what the rumor said, it was a really brutal fight, completely ignoring the rules...."

Anzu stiffly nodded from the side. It was just known as a rumor, but it seemed to be spreading pretty far and become well known.

"O..... our kid became an urban legend.....!"

Miharu^[Mifa] who doesn't check the forum other than system-related ones hold her head over the astonishing fact, meanwhile Haruha in question hold Mifa's hand and loosely smile, then twist herself shyly.

"Ehehehe..... you made Haruha blush *blush*."

"No, we're sooo not praising you....."

"But, don't OKG sounds like an idol in a TV. Idol sing and dance?"

When Haruha is bigger, maybe Haruha can be an Idol with Mommy? Mommy will sing, and Haruha will be doing the handshakes."

"What happened to being a sumo player, oi."

"Sakura" then kneeled and flicked Haruha's forehead with her finger. She looked over Haruha who happily closed her eyes with one left half-open, and then she raised her head and said.

"Come to think of it..... he's not with you today? That guy who you called Daddy?"

"Daddy still hasn't come back from school. He said he will buy me a Choko no Egg^[12]. He might be troubled for not finding any in stores.

But Haruha need one more Rasupu-chan figurine to complete the collection, so Haruha is looking forward for that."

Choko no Egg is an egg-shaped chocolate snack with a small toy inside. Depending on the timing, it might be flying off the shelves..... Sorry for Haruha, but Yuu probably forgot about buying it already.

"Sakura" made a no sense face, and Mifa carefully answered.

“That person..... Clamp is investigating about other the thing.”

She had a problem deciding if it is okay to tell her that that he went to visit Sakura in real life. “Sakura” herself meanwhile did not suspect a thing.

“Is that so..... I actually investigated him, Clamp of Scarabaeus. He wasn’t as famous as OKG, but I heard his name every once a while.”

“Ah, I heard that he killed a player killer named Memento-something with a strange suspicious techniques”

The one who said that was Ren. It’s clear that she’s still scared as her voice was trembling. “Sakura” nodded shallowly.

“Haruha said that her 『Daddy』 defeated that Memento, and thanks to that I was able to find him. With this I’ll be able to get revenge on the humiliation he did to me back in the Arcade, I was happy..... but it doesn’t matter now.”

It was the first— tearful face “Sakura” ever shown. As she walked over to “Sakura”, Mifa asked.

“Tell me what happened. Why among the masked men, you were there?”

“Sakura” began to talk after she shorted out her memories.

Kanna Sakura who login into 『CtG』 to look for Clamp of Scarabaeus started training herself for the upcoming rematch, in other words, increasing her avatar— Yusra’s level by participating in battle and doing quests.

In middle of that, she found herself in Wizards’ Glaive, and in there Yusra met the guild known as 《Crystal World》.

All of their members wear a strange mask that cover their upper half face, from what she heard in the city, the guild was formed few months ago.

Initially, they were like a religious group, but due their overly eccentric former guild master, †Noah†, they barely gathered enough people and many players thought that they will eventually be disbanded soon.

『Each one of you is not aware of the true value of this world! Humans are nothing but animals. Therefore, no matter how hard you discipline your mind

and spirit, once you're reduced to poverty, you will return to be a mere mindless beast. Injury, illness, old age, all of it will affect and physiologically interfere with your mind and undermine your virtue.

However! In this virtual world, we won't bear the burden of physical bidding, allowing us to stabilize our mind to the fullest! Not filching to pain or submit to pleasure, as long as we straighten our mind and abandon our greed—we will be able to create a world without lies, the true real world!

That's right, a completely transparent world, 《Crystal World》! Now, let's advance on a quest of truth in this new world with us!』

But, regardless of how advanced the virtual world is, majority of 『CtG』 players are those who seek for unusual and strong stimulation. There are only few people who took interest in his insight.

In middle of that.

The moment a certain girl joined the guild, the tide changes. This girl who were preaching on the street playing no heed to day and night suddenly appeared in front of †Noah†, and right after listening to his speech, she said.

『A world without lies.

Well then, your wish shall be granted. Everything will be okay if you become Iku. Everything will go well if everyone becomes Iku.』

Ikui Librium Gepetto.^[13]

That was the name of the blue haired girl. She's around 16 or 17 year old. She has a slender body like that of a young tree, and has somewhat an androgynous appearance. Her standing figure with thin robe hanging on her shoulder makes her looks younger.

That time, Ikui did something. In 《Crystal World》, they call that act as “disproportionation”, and no outsider even aware of it till now. And so, everything changed.

After that, 《Crystal World》 began to engage in fortune telling in the streets of Wizards' Glaive. Ikui's fortune telling is infallible, especially when dealing with costumer with human relationship issues, she was able to give them satisfying

answers. In the past, †Noah†’s reputation was not exactly favorable, but through the young player’s reviews and words, his name was spread.

Thus, avid costumers gradually become a member of 《Crystal World》 guild. And 《Crystal World》 that finally raised enough funds from dozens of member bought the Guild Base Building ▪ Crystal Hotel and made it their headquarters.

In the Crystal Hotel built inside the deep forest of Wizards’ Glaive, 《Crystal World》 continue to do fortune telling and “disproportionation”, and further recruiting more members. Starting then, the guild members started wearing a mask with pointy nose and call themselves as Cristal ▪ Cleric.

Yusra learned about 《Crystal World》 when a player whom she met in a subjugation quest before talked about it. She was that big girl, Anzu. She’s a big fortune telling fan and she invited Yusra to go with her to the Crystal Hotel.

The fortune Yusra asked to Ikui Librium was to know the whereabouts of Clamp of Scarabaeus. But, Ikui then made an absent-minded eyes and stare at Yusra’s face. Her whisper was like a small bell.

『Do you wish for a lie?』

『?No, I hate liar.』

Won’t that be unfair, Yusra answered, and Ikui nodded. Then, she stretched her hand slowly. White, white, a ghost-like hand.

『Well then, I shall grant that wish of yours, then you may come. Everything will go well if we all come. 』

Ikui’s fingertips touched the tip of Yusra’s nose— then Yusra lost her consciousness.

By the time she woke up, she found herself in Raiankarydi church. She woke up in the same restart point as when she gets a game over, but that should only happen after she logout once. She can’t understand why she was thrown there.

Furthermore, all of her equipment disappeared and she’s wearing the default plain clothes, somehow she can’t change to Extend^{AR} Mode..... and moreover she can’t activate menu screen. In other words, she can’t logout by herself.

A surprise one after another, the other players in the church were staring at

her with suspicions —the next thing she realized was that her status menu was garbled and people suspected her for modification—.

(What? What happened, to me?)

Thinking that 《Crystal World》 just fooled her, Yusra once again went to Crystal Hotel. But, standing right in front of the said place and was blocking her way was— Yusra.

Not only she have the same face, but she wear exactly the same equipment she lost, and moreover her semi-auto martial art skill and manual control fight style combination was unmistakably something that she herself develop after many trails and errors.

In the end, Yusra was killed by the same-faced Yusra.

Again, she got teleported back to Raiankarydi church. She didn't even get a game over.

Later Anzu appeared in the church wearing a plain default clothes just like her, and she met some people who provided her with information. They identify themselves as the victim of 《Crystal World》, just like her.

『Ikui Librium ▪ Gepetto of 《Crystal World》..... She is, a monster who have the power to split avatar in this virtual world!』

“—Splitting..... an avatar?”

Mifa ask back, but it's not like she didn't believe them. In fact, it's exactly why she was stunned. It's an unbelievable story for a normal player, but Mifa and her family knew about Memento who has the power to enhance human stimulation.

But “Sakura” — no, Yusra did not think so and let out weak voice.

“We're not lying. He..... Clamp also saw her right, erm, myself?”

“Yes. I believe you, it's why I'm taken aback. But, how can such thing happen.....”

“Don't ask us. We're the one who wanted to know”

Yusra glanced at Anzu and Ren, and then continued her story.

“After that, Anzu and the others, along with those with the same circumstances hide in the woods and go from place to place regularly..... if we stay in the city, people will mistake us as a cheater, and sometimes the people from 《Crystal World》 will be there to recruit people.

Those people always attack us each time we met, probably hate the fact that we have the same face. Same goes for yesterday. Even though they’re just a split of us.....”

“But, even if you’re killed you will just return to the church right?”

Then it’s all okay, said Haruha, attempting to reassure them— Yusra got mad and yelled.

“It’s not that simple! We don’t even know what kind of thing we are!? We’re not even sure if we can safely return back to the church next time..... not to mention, no one in the real world would even know what happened to us!”

“I’m sorry.....”

The one who obediently apologized was Mifa. Haruha made a surprised face and was frozen in place. Yusra saw that and let out weaken voice, calming down her own anger.

“Maybe because some data got broken we can’t pass the church reincarnation mirror, meaning we can’t even escape from Wizards’ Glaive.....”

“Can’t you report that to the administrator?”

“We don’t know..... there are some victim who reported through player whom they acquaintance with, but there’s still no reply.”

.....That probably because the human equilibrium institute or the other institutes above them ignored those reports, they have given priority to all Hadzar-related cases. But unlike continuous fainting incident Memento caused, this case did not go on public, because there aren’t any victims.

After all, Sakura in the real world still act normally and went to school. At the very least as long she doesn’t show any problematic behavior, they won’t do any active investigation.

“.....Four days had passed since I was first trapped. There are also some who

are trapped for months, and I might be too and yet, the other players are even aware of what is happening.

That means... it doesn't even matter whether we're there or not, no one outside will even talk about us.....”

Yusra then lie down as if surrendering, and her body formed the word of “Big”^[14].

“But before of even thinking of a way to go home, more importantly, do we even have a place to go back to?”

She leaned her face towards her elbow, as if she was about to cry.

But in this virtual world... you can't cry.

Part 8

“Pleased to meet you” it was Ikui Librium’s first words.

.....What is starting? As he thought of that, ^[15]

“Iku is not familiar with the concept of first meeting. It is Iku’s wish for you to understand that this way of speaking is the result of Iku trying to avoid making any false remarks.”

She continued to explain. Her voice was smooth like a seamless slate. As weird as she sounded, he could strangely still understand the rough meaning of her words. In other words, because she tried to be as literal as possible, her speech ended up like that.

The 《Crystal World》 that aimed to create a world without lies.

Clamp was taken to the top floor of Crystal hotel. Looking down, the entire surface of the floor was made of transparent crystal plate.

30 meters or greater above the ground. In this room that was traversed directly from the birdcage-like elevator, one could feel the diamond colored light passing through the roof of the trees.

Despite the enchanting layout of the room, the room itself was not that big. The room can easily be filled by fifteen adults, although there were just six of them it already felt cramped enough.

Ikui then sat on top of the bed at the corner of the room, from her side appeared a magician-like man wearing a mask with the number 『1』 on it, along with two masked warriors from both his sides. As Yusra sealed the exit route, Clamp faced Ikui by himself.

De facto leader of the 《Crystal World》 guild, he came here to investigate Ikui’s identity..... or he was, because he had already achieved that from the moment they met face-to-face.

The only girl who did not wear a mask in this crystal tower, Ikui Riburium.

Wrapped by a thin translucent robe and possessing a neutral, graceful face,

this girl who appeared to be somewhat absent and faraway was absolutely nothing similar to the innocent Haruha or the cruel Memento.

But, all of them let out a unique air; their mysterious purity and blade-like dangerous atmosphere are precisely what they all have in common.

There's no mistake. She is—

“That's right. Iku is a Hadzar. A product of 『A method to produce new humans』”

Once again, she answered before he could even ask, he couldn't help but feel chilled from her behavior and action.

No matter how you look at it, the timing is too good. Almost as if—

“That's right. Ikui's Absolute Unit Evolution^[Man Mod] is to figure out the wish of a human within Iku's range of sight”

Man Mod. Niiro once talked about it, the name of the unique ability that Hadzars possess.

“A-Are you saying you can read minds.....?”

Surprised, he tried to brace himself, but it didn't seem to bother her even in the slightest bit.

In contrast Ikui remained expressionless, which made Clamp suspect whether she was sleeping with her eyes open or not.

Just how far she can see through him, he still doesn't know.

“No. The only thing Iku knows are just wishes”

“Therefore Ikui Librium is able to grant those wishes without hearing their words”

The one who said that was the 『1』 masked magician. Looking through the extend mode, his name tag spelled †Noa†. He spoke in a flat tone like Yusra and Ikui, but this man alone sounded like he's in a play.

Clamp sighed. He don't know just how powerful Ikui's ability is, but it's clear that she's a Hadzar and her mind-reading is not a simple magic trick. This will surely be a troublesome negotiation.

“.....First of all, tell me what you want. Why do you want to meet me?”

“Understood. Iku’s, in other word, Hadzar’s owed wish is to become a Neo Primate and enter the stage of self-replicating.

Iku is aware of the fact that you’re the 『Parent』 of the first successful incarnated unit, Haruha. And to be able to meet the human who was able to make that happen is Iku’s wish.”

Iku’s response was unnaturally smooth; enough to make you think that she’s a nice obedient girl. It was unexpected that she knew about Yuu, but come to think of it Memento also knew about him, could it be that Haruha’s “parent” is a famous figure among the Hadzars.

And, judging from the way she easily said the word Hadzar in this situation means that Yusra and other members are also aware of the existence of Hadzar.

Is it okay to let people know about this..... he thought, but that is Niiro’s job to think about. Clamp should just continue his own work.

“So..... What do you want to do after seeing?”

“No. There is nothing to it. It was just a simple wish of Iku to see you in person”

“If that is the case, then——”

“Your wish is to hear the answer of your question. Iku shall grant that wish of yours”

Clamp shut his mouth. To speak in this situation is just idiotic. Also, he wanted to know the identity of the “Ghosts” and the relationship between “Sakura” and Yusra.

But his wish, was not granted.

“No. Iku does not possess the mean to grant that wish”

“Oi! Could it be, are you saying that you don’t know the reason why a lookalike of Yusra over there became a 『Ghost』!? There is no way such a coincidence would happen——”

“We are also puzzled by the existence of those ghosts”

Again, the 『1』 †Noa† spoke. Clamp quickly glared at him.

“But it seems that you guys have an idea of what is the cause”

“Somehow, each time Ikui Librium performed 『Disproportionation』 on a new comrade, they showed up at the church. We do not know what they are, but since they have the same appearance as us, we call them 『Ghosts』”

“.....What is disproportionation?”

“To make people unable to tell lies anymore”

The one who answered from behind was— Yusra. Clamp turned 90 degrees backwards.

“I don’t get it..... does that have anything to do with Ikui’s mind-reading power?”

Indeed, there is no way you can say lies in front of her. Is it some kind of seminar done to warn new members who just joined 《Crystal World》 to not lie. If that is the case, it’s not that hard to understand why Sakura’s personality change so much.

But, †Noa† denied it.

“Ikui Librium has one more power. That is the power to unite our wishes into one and bless it”

“That’s right. Iku’s wish is everyone’s wish.

Therefore, if everyone became Iku there will be no lies”

Ikui faced Clamp with her pale eyes. Even now she looks sleepy and powerless, but she appears to be unshaken by anything. Clamp was entwined by her stare.

“Then..... in other words, what do you mean?”

“Every action that we, the 《Crystal World》, take is a result of mutual agreement”

Yusra griped her own hand then opened it slowly.

“All of us act to accomplish the same purpose, and are linked for the same purpose.

There are no lies in each of these fingers”

“Does that mean that you were all taken under Ikui’s will.....?”

Doesn’t that mean they have been brainwashed! Clamp unconsciously grabbed hold of his sword, but Ikui unceremoniously shook her head.

“No. It’s the other way around.

Because, Iku’s wish is their wish. We aim to accomplish the goal that everyone shares. Therefore, if Iku transfers herself into them, that wish will become everyone’s wish. There will be no need for anyone to lie.

And, that consensus shall be the key to a world without lies”

“I don’t know what happened, but Kanna had turned into a completely different person!”

“Right. To get rid of her lies, we cut off the unnecessary parts of her.

It’s just like the origin of this virtual world. In order to have multiple wills to cross without conflict; those wills must be rounded up together like the stones on a riverside. The pile of round stones must be lined out with no gaps, and eventually it will become one single rock. One lump of rock is solely just one on its own, therefore no lies can be done within.

That is, the way to create a world without lies”

If you mix together dozens of egos together then try to pull out something out of it, what you get will surely be an innocuous and uncharacteristic personality. Under the name of peace and unity, the participants of this ritual were reduced and changed into a plain personality just like Sakura.

Then he realized. Niiro had said it already, the cause of the “Ghosts” appearances and personality change cases, is undoubtedly her.

Somehow, Haruha’s sparkling smile passed through his mind.

“—That is worse than lies! They’re throwing their selves!”

He yelled as anger had gotten the better of himself, but Ikui did not react. Her blue eyes did not flinch even a bit.

And then she easily said.

“That’s right. However, isn’t it hard for you to say so many lies?”

To Fuyufu, who was always by his side longer than anyone else, he kept the secret of Haruha and Miharu.

To Miharu, he failed to tell her about his undecided feelings towards Fuyufu.

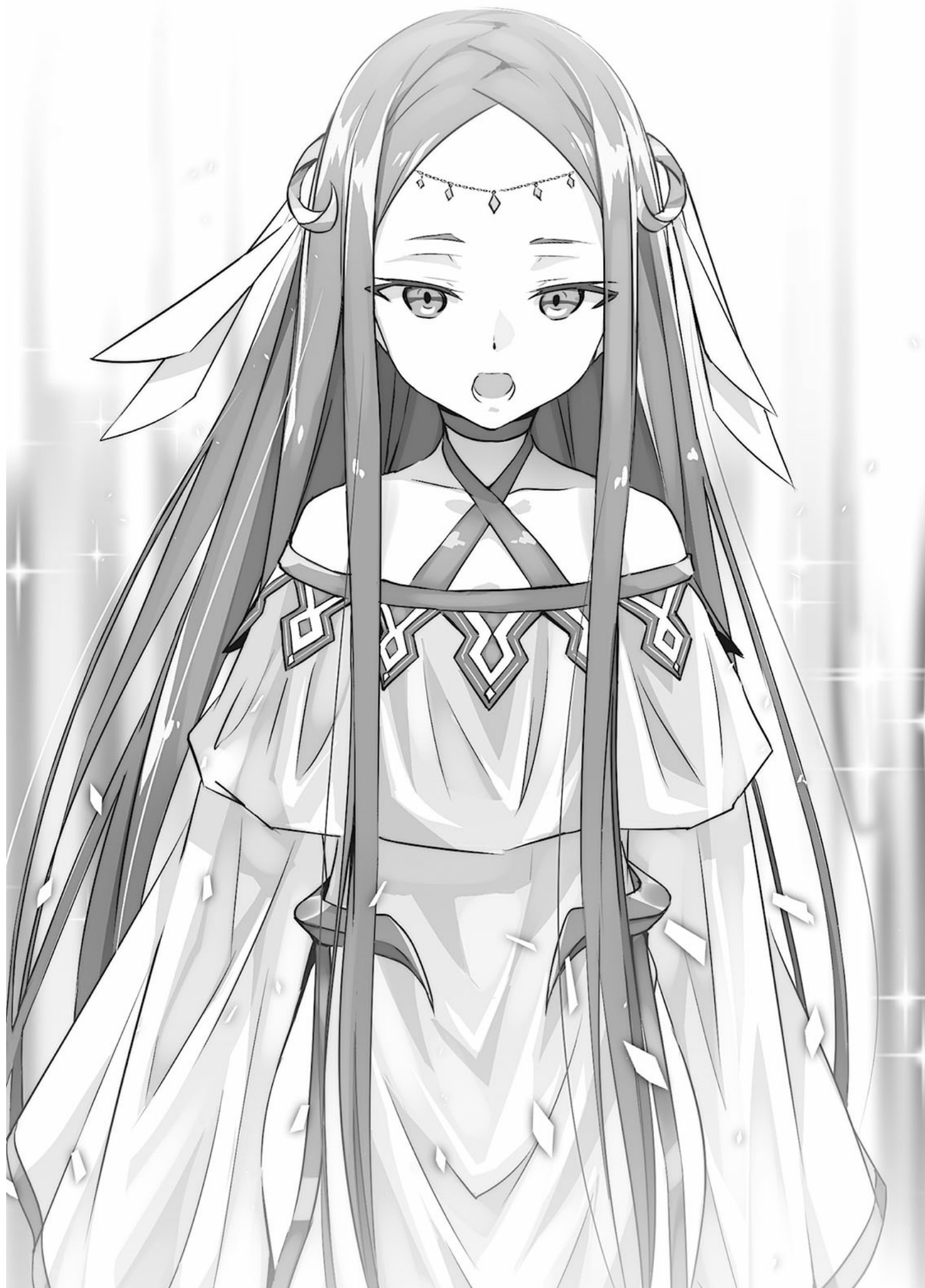
To Haruha, the girl whom he wanted to protect, he couldn’t help but feel powerless in front of her existence.

And then— to his mother who died before he was able to tell her about his true feelings.

Their faces became a sharp knife and pierced his chest.

His breathing, throbbing, and movement, stopped.

Inside the room surrounded by four walls made of crystal, the clear sunlight refracted and distorted his vision like a kaleidoscope, it teared up his eyes.



And as if entering into the gap of his confusion, Ikui's hand approached Clamp's face. Precisely like a crystal, like ghosts, those small opened finger were crystal clear—

“Kugh.....!”

Clamp violently slapped that hand of her.

“?”

Although getting roughly rejected Ikui's expression did not change. No, to say the least her face looked slightly puzzled. However she stayed indifferent.

Irritated, he yelled.

“Mind your own business..... I'll deal with my own problem myself”

“That is not possible”

The one who arrogantly said that were †Noat†, and the two swordsmen who were standing by Ikui's sides.

“Wishes that are not yet normalized will only cause distortion”

“Personal happiness can only move, not spread”

Without giving signs or receiving any sign, the swordsmen casted 《Acceleration》^[Accelerate] to each other. Although it only has a short effect duration, it's the skill that creates a ball of light that generate attraction force within the range of the user's vision.

While being pulled by the force the pair unleashed slashes that cut both of Clamp's legs before he was able to react.

It was not just fast, but at the same time, their attack covered up the weak points of the other which prevented Clamp from even defending himself. That is the meaning of uniting wishes into one. Like grabbing things with five fingers, without the need to think they all move in conjunction to accomplish a shared objective without failure.

(Did Haruha really kill all of them in one sweep.....!)

Unable to do anything as he got both his legs cut off Clamp fell onto the floor, and Yusra quickly locked his shoulder joints from behind. Meanwhile his other

hand was pressed between his body and the floor, he couldn't move at all.

"Every time you always unsettled me..... so you too, should become Ikui Librium"

"You..... are you really okay with that!"

"All the pain I had when I was injured with this incurable injury, and the suffering I had when I chased after you, is all gone. I was saved"

"That is—"

He wanted to say something to Yusra, but he couldn't finish his words. That was because it was hard to breath as his back was pressed so hard, and it also because he's unsure whether it was okay to deny the fact that Sakura was saved by being taken in by Ikui.

Me too..... if I become just like them, will I be freed from the regret I have when I lost my mother?

As his mind was caught in the middle of hesitation and confusion, all of a sudden, Ikui sat by his side. Her blue eyes and white hand. It took tens of seconds to logout through the menu, it's impossible to escape from the virtual world in this situation.

Clamp's scream filled the entire room.

"Kugh..... what do you guys want to do with all this!?"

"Eventually all players will become Ikui Librium, and this virtual world, will become a utopia free from any contradiction and suffering"

The one who answered was †Noa†, and naturally no one voiced any denial. †Noa†'s dubious representation aside, that is certainly their consensus. Everyone is aiming for the same purpose; therefore this is a world with equality and no discontent.

In this world of 『CtG』, and with Ikui's power, that is possible.

".....Geez"

Clamp sighed. What Niuro Mainsei said proved no help.

"Again, in the end, she is not a person who we can peacefully talk this out

with”

Ikui who was about to touch Clamp suddenly pulled back her hand and took a step back. Yusra, and the other three look at her in confusion.

And then, before Ikui was able to explain the meaning of her retreat.

The hidden bomb that Clamp was hiding under his clothes explodes.

Part 9

After that Clamp died and logged out safely, and Kasugai Yuu's consciousness departed back to the real world.

The vision of a cloudy world displayed over his Ramiel visor as he opened his eyes. While fighting the unreasonable pain spreading over his guts, he took off the visor.

What he first saw was the unfamiliar net café's small two-room. Not even an hour into the game and he was already dead tired, and the overly cold air conditioner makes him feel sluggish.

By his side, Kanna Sakura had also taken off her Ramiel. She still wore the same apathetic face as before, but a faint color of condemnation could be clearly seen in her eyes.

Yuu apologized as he return his Ramiel to the charger spot.

"I'm sorry, for getting you caught in that explosion along with me"

To deal with the Hadzar-related cases like this one, he had prepared something to force-logout himself before it's too late, and it was that expensive and powerful bombs. The other guys aside, Yusra who was standing near him wouldn't have survived that. He ended up making her pay a needless death penalty.

If he use the instant teleportation caused by the coordinate bug that he used during his fight against Memento, he wouldn't have to take such aggressive action. But just the other day, the management team had already fixed that bug.

But the similar "When placing item on the field directly from the item box and activating a magic shortcut, the coordinate data of the previously placed item will remain" bug still hasn't been fixed, it seems no witnesses from his fight against Memento reported that.

Since it was his emergency trump card, it became a great setback for the "Clamp of Scarabaeus". He planned to give up on it, but when dealing with

opponents like Ikui, he couldn't help but to rely on it.

(.....Ahh, oh well. I was cheating to begin with)

As he thought about that, Sakura said no words of discontent, and just simply asked.

“Why did you run? Why did you run away from the words of salvation, where no one possess any ulterior thought, and all with your memory and will still intact”

It's hard to explain the obvious. They just physically aim to create a world with no lies, and what's wrong with that. As he thought about that, he stood up.

“Dunno. Maybe.....”

He recalled the crying face of a young Fuyufu. What he recalled was a crying face from long time ago, but his present self is smiling.

“I don't hate lies. I think”

He wasn't very sure himself, but, he answered so.

Yuu then exited the room. Now that he had learnt about the existence of Hadzar, her power, and her objectives, he must report this to Hajime.

For whatever reason, Sakura did not stop him at all. She just simply watched over him.

As he left, he left one word for her.

“At the very least, I like the you whom I met back at the arcade more”

Sakura did not say anything, however, just a little she regained the atmosphere of her past self as she faintly replied.

“.....Again, I lost to him”

Part 10

That night.

Hajime Hidari was troubled.

The Kasugai household's living room was filled with a threatening atmosphere.

Sitting in front of the table were Yuu, Miharu, Haruha who was sitting on Miharu's knee, and Niiru Mansei sitting face-to-face to Hajime. It's supposedly the time to report all the information they've gathered so far..... however.

Yuu and Miharu strained the atmosphere of this meeting. Miharu was mad at Yuu who went by himself, and Yuu was mad at Miharu who went to 『CtG』 to investigate without permission.

“Well, both of you..... you two are putting the cart before the horse here, getting angry over worrying each other like that”

It's troublesome to let this be prolonged any longer —these two always drag things out when they fight, it's really annoying— therefore, Hajime bluntly said.

However.

“We're not fighting.

It just, not only did she make such careless contact with an unidentified party, when we met she proudly said 『Welcome back, I've looked into the case for you』 and the likes, then gets into a bad mood all by herself, this hard worker Kugimiya-san.”

“Eh? Hmph, not only did he invite a middle school girl he just met at the arcade to a private room-date, despite ending up as a perfect example of the common expression『Mummy hunter become the mummy』, he acted like an overbearing husband and impassively ranted 『Just leave such things to me, you just have to worry about house chores or something』, isn't this just a hysteric caused by such a chauvinistic Kasugai-kun?”

.....

Despite sitting side-by-side, these two high school student refused to even lock eyes with the other, it's scary. Anyway, it's scary.

(Geez, isn't this just a simple married couple quarrel.....)

Hajime placed her hand against her forehead and sighed, she decided to cut short to persuasion.

"If you continue to be like that, Haruha-chan is going to be troubled you know. In Married couple^[such] quarrel, a kid won't be able to decide who the right one is and end up being troubled by it"

Once the two quickly reflect on themselves after knowing that their fight would hurt Haruha, so she thought it would be effective, but.

After hearing her own name, Haruha raised her head and went "Eh?" then frankly said.

"Well, it's... normal?"

.....Ah is that so. Hajime became convinced. She might've just been simply sick of dealing with Yuu and Miharuru.

"Daddy and Mommy are always fighting! Haruha can't deal with it anymore, Haruha says that to them. They still sleep together at night though, so it's okay."

In the end, Haruha got used to it. Exactly because they fight often and made up as often that she is convinced that they will stay in a good relationship even if they quarrel from time to time.

"Those words are kind of misleading though....."

The two quickly averted their eyes and blushed.

Hajime got really irritated, but she decided to ignore it.

"Well then"

Now that the atmosphere had taken a turn for the better, Niiru who had been silent for a while opened his mouth.

"Taking account of all the information you two have gathered so far, we can finally see the outline of this incident"

Yuu and Miharuru's eyes switched direction to Niiru. Haruha lowered her head

and made a troubled face.

“First off, about Ikui Librium Gepetto’s ability, just as the person herself said, it’s safe to say that her power is a power to read other person’s desire.

It’s a masterpiece known as the reception-type Hadzar created by a team other than us.

By sensing the neural cells emitted from a human body within her field of view, and decrypt it’s meaning crafted within it, she is able to accurately read what the other person is thinking and wants to do”

“Erm..... in other words, she’s able to read people’s mind.....?”

Miharu asked as she clung onto Haruha.

“It depends on your definition of mind. All she should be able to read are the real-time images of the mind, the person’s constant desires, and his/her future actions, she shouldn’t be able to read other person’s memories or his/her trauma that the person himself/herself is unaware of”

“So, reading his/her desire huh.....”

“In contrary to Memento who interferes with her opponent’s empathy ability, she’s an individual who possess tremendous empathy herself. She’s able to accurately read other person’s desire after all, she possess overwhelming advantage against people who fight with their brains or instincts.

However, she doesn’t interest me much”

“Why? It sounds like a ridiculously useful ability to me”

Yuu genuinely asked, but the answer was obvious for a person like Niiro and Hajime.

“What our team pursues is a new human that has both intelligence and emotion, and is able to resonate with the current human. Does Ikui Librium whom you met fits such a character?”

“.....No. Even including the fact that she’s a Hadzar, she appears to be just an existence that merely grants other people’s wishes and desires..... well, her method aside”

Yuu then crossed his arms together, and Hajime shrugged her shoulders a little in respond.

“I’ve also read my share of the report, Ikui is, ever since she generated from the form of a little girl she’s able to read the desire of people around her.

Not to mention as a Hadzar she possess a weak sense of self, being raised in such a condition had blurred the boundaries between herself and other people within her mind. In the end..... she failed to develop self-consciousness. 『I』 is a sense of being 『No one else』 after all.

That’s why when she grew to the equivalent of a 10 year old, they did not conduct incarnation experiments into the real world. It was obviously impossible. Even now, she’s using part of Haruha-chan’s data to stabilize herself I suppose”

Precisely because she knows about that, she tried to approach Yuu who became Haruha’s “Father”.

“Therefore Ikui confuses herself as the human she came across, and behaves according to their consistent actions.

And, the things that all humans..... no, organisms, have in common are self-replication and breeding. Originally, it can simply be fulfilled by giving birth to a child.....”

“But Ikui decided to increase the number of people who share the same thoughts as herself huh. Why did she do such..... an outrageous thing?”

“We won’t know unless we ask the person herself, but surprisingly, it might be because of a simple reason like one can’t give birth in virtual reality such as 『CtG』”

She frankly said. Yuu and Miharū instinctively looked at each other and blushed. Haruha looked at them and tilted her head in confusion.

“But Haruha was born in game right?”

“You’re special in a lot of ways after all, Haruha-chan”

Hmmm, Haruha appear to be completely unaware of that. Her eyes were glassy and she looks sleepy. Come to think of it, since Miharū returned early she

did not take a nap today.

Yuu lightly cleared his throat and asked a question.

“But, is it possible to change a person’s personality?”

“Taking account of her original ability, perhaps by electrical activity she forcefully tuned the desires and the decision making part of the brain of the person she touches and synchronizes it with herself. It’s similar to when an electric eel discharges electrical currents and shocks its prey’s muscle to disable its body I suppose.

I would name it 『Fahrenheit 451』.

.....By understanding the function of a person’s nerve pulse, she is able to control that person huh? Fumu.....”

On behalf of Niiro who stopped in the middle of his explanation to think, Hajime took over the conversation and continued.

“I don’t think it will last long though, so they must be taking 『Treatment』 and get tuned on a daily basis. 『CtG』 doesn’t allow long-term login periods, so maybe they can be cured with medicine or something”

“Come to think of it, it says stuff about currency or something. I see, so there is a way to heal them huh.....”

Looking at Yuu who was patting his chest in relief, Hajime refrained from saying “There might be a way to cure them, but there is no guarantee that they can be cured”.

“—Ermmm”

Miharu spoke stiffly.

“I still don’t understand anything about the 『Ghost』 case yet. If the power of that Ikui person is to change other people’s personality, then what exactly are the 『Ghost』 people who appeared at the same time?”

The one who answered her was Niiro who had just finished thinking.

“We need to verify it first, but there is one hypothesis we can conclude from it.

It’s most likely a bug. However, it’s different from the software-related ones

that Kasugai-kun's mother was involved it. It's a bug that's caused by the hardware"

"By 『CtG』 hardware you mean, that thing that is processed by the user itself....."

"That's right, the Nephilim Computer.

As you might have already know it works with a horribly fuzzy processor, therefore it's able to reproduce the reality of the real world, in this case, things become willy-nilly over its awfully flexible specification.

It's assumed that the players who got tuned by Ikui had instantaneously got their brain wave patterns changed. Unable to cope with these rapid changes, the 『CtG』 system treated the previous and current brain waves as different avatars and works it so that the second ego can exist at the same time.

"That..... but, those 『Ghost』 are not as awkward as NPCs and possess feelings, intelligence..... and memories too though?"

Miharu seemed to be not convinced as she once talked with the "Ghost" and felt their human touch as Mifa. Hajime has also seen that scene through Haruha's Ramiel, so she fully understands why Miharu was confused. But.

Hajime took out a notepad and drew an illustration of a deformed brain inside a small walking doll.

"To put it simply Nephilim Computer is a giant brain where the wisdom of a hundred thousand people are fused together, and the common existence known as souls are given avatars to walk inside it.

And if that Nephilim mistakably recognized one person as two, it might create a second avatar that possess the knowledge and memories of the original person. Of course the 『Second one』 does not possess a flesh body in the real world that is connected to Ramiel that serves as the gate to the game system, so it can't deal with the software of the game program, therefore it becomes an entity unable to be recognized by the system. It might also be the reason why the data is broken when they were seen through AR Mode"

"A bug created from the unique device known as the Nephilim Computer and the unique character known as Ikui Librium Gepetto..... Ah, rather than an insect

it is”

The thing that closed the conversation was Niiro Mansei’s dry voice that somehow got on others’ nerves.

“Truly, a ghost”

Part 11

As she took a hot shower, she enjoyed the tickling sensation of sweat falling from her skin. Kanna Sakura then laid down on the bed in her room, spreading her limbs wide to relax and allowed herself to surrender to exhaustion like a doll.

Her room was small. When she was younger, she liked this smallness that reminded her of a secret base. The fluorescent lamp she just replaced constantly shone with a white color. The rest of the luggage that couldn't fit inside the room was taken to the loft made by her father, but even now it appeared to be almost at bursting point.

Her bookshelf was buried by a cover.

Sakura, whose instinctual drive had been altered by Ikui Librium, did not feel boredom and did nothing. But as she had no orders to execute, she was on standby.

The only things that flowed in her head were Kasugai Yuu's face, when he said he liked her painful self better but denied the fact that the current her was saved, and also Haruha's innocent smile.

Recently her mother looked more worried than before, when she looked at the current her who was calm and no longer behaved in a problematic manner.

She glanced at her bookshelf. Naturally, she did not see the randomly lined up certificates and trophies nor the unevenly lined up game walkthrough books.

It was because it's was under a cover.

Part 12

Several hours ago. Miharu was drying her hair in the dressing room. Her gloomy expression covered by her long hair.

The dryer that she just randomly switched off was a dryer called Perl Pink, a product clearly targeted for women, which she found placed behind the washstand mirror. After receiving the permission from Yuu, Miharu and Haruha used it to dry their hairs ever since.

It appeared to belong to Yuu's mother. It didn't appear to be used often, and he said it's practically new so he didn't throw it away. However, it's likely that even if it's broken, Yuu wouldn't throw it away. Somehow, she thought so.

It's a proof. The proof that Yuu's mother, who lived here, did not spend her days here. Miharu touched it, and inside her head she imagined the figure of — He showed her a picture of her before — Yuu's mother using the dryer just like her right now. It made her a little happy. It made her feel like she was a person of this house.

On the other hand, she felt a different sensation when she was at her real mother and father-in-law's house. That, certainly, was pain instilled into her chest.

(I wonder what Kasugai-kun thinks of me when I use this dryer.)

Right now, that was what she wondered the most.

Then, she felt that she started to understand a little more. The thing she heard at the living room, about the dreamy world, in which the Hadzar known as Ikui Librium, talked about.

(But, to know what everyone else is thinking..... is scary)

She let out a bitter laughter and her breath hit the steamy mirror that was clouded by the steam of the bath, further fogging it.

In the end, the 《Crystal World》 incident that happened in 『CtG』 could not be resolved immediately.

Seeing the suffering Sakura, Miharu felt very unhappy. Since there was a possibility that they were able to discuss things out with the team in charge of Ikui Librium, she was told to wait for a day or two— after being told that, she just couldn't say anything more.

It's the best to be able to resolve things peacefully. If they ended up having to fight like they did against Memento, Haruha and Yuu will surely do something reckless. Of course she will try to stop them, but this pair of father and daughter was pretty stubborn themselves.

Not to mention OKG^{Haruha} had been asked by the "Ghosts" to help them on a raid against Ikui.

Things might return to normal once Ikui, who's clearly the cause of all of these, was defeated— that was the remaining ray of hope the "Ghosts" had left. But, the power of 《Crystal World》 member way surpassed theirs. No, with their inhuman level of perfectly coordinated attacks they were even able to defeat groups composed of skilled players out there.

In the face of such desperate situation, OKG and Clamp of Scarabaeus appeared in front of them.



Due to Yuu and Haruha's personality, they wouldn't be able to refuse their request in such a situation. Especially if the person who asked them was Sakura.

But Ikui Librium, depending on how you looked at it, might even be a more dangerous opponent than Memento. If they messed up, Clamp and Haruha might end up getting caught by the 《Crystal World》.

If that was the case, then it's better to rely on Niiro and his men.

But the depressing part was that she couldn't tell the "Ghosts" Yusra and her friends the detail of the situation. After all, if the original Yusra and her friends returned to normal, just what would happen to those "Ghosts"? Everything depended on the Nephilim Computer whim; there was no guessing what it would do.

Would they simply be annihilated? Would they remain to exist as irregular existence? Would their memories be merged with their real body?

She didn't have the courage to say such irresponsible things like "We won't know unless we try". Yuu had said ".....I'll go explain things to them once we know what exactly will happen" and Miharuru was determined to go along with him when he did.

In addition, Hajime said she would try to construct a program that would allow their memories to merge. But she also did say to not expect too much, hence there's nothing else to do but to hope.

Brooding, she headed to the second floor bedroom—Yuu's bedroom.

The dark room was only lighted by the nightlight and filled with the smell of other people that she was not used with yet.

Although she had already adapted to living in the real world and able to take care of the house alone during daytime, Haruha still insisted on having the three of them sleep together at night. She seemed afraid of losing her consciousness in the dark and waking up only to find that the two of them were no longer there with her.

Once, Haruha was so shocked when she woke up in the middle of the night finding no one (as Yuu went to the toilet), she started bawling.

Because it took some time for Miharuru to dry her hair, she told Yuu to go upstairs and accompany Haruha to sleep first. She thought that they might be sleeping at the moment so she silently approached the bed. But then.

“Ah, Mommy.....”

Yuu was quietly making soft sleeping sounds while Haruha alone, who wore cute pajamas while hugging a wool stuffed doll, opened her eyes.

How rare.

Usually she would immediately fall asleep once she buried herself onto the bed.

“You can’t sleep?”

“Nn..... can we talk?”

Miharuru climbed onto the bed as she watched over Yuu’s sleeping face. Not as easily as Haruha but he would fall asleep faster than her, and would usually let out a snore. When he’s asleep, his face looked more childish than normal, but maybe that was because he’s tired and his cheek appeared to be harder.

In a hushed voice, she told Haruha.

“It’s okay, but Kasugai-kun is sleeping so we should speak quietly okay?”

“Okay.”

As Miharuru laid down and covered herself with her towel blanket, Haruha rolled her small body and hugged her. She buried her head into her breasts that was wrapped in sleepwear.

“What is it?”

Maybe it was to prevent her voice from leaking out, but Haruha cupped her mouth with her hand as if whispering

“You see.....”

psss psss, the small voice that came from her mouth tickled Miharuru as it rang inside her breast. She smiled and smelled Haruha’s hair that smelled strangely differently from hers.

“Haruha....., is Haruha hated by Sakura-chan?”

For a moment, she didn't understand what she meant, but then she realized that she must be worried about the time when she said some insensitive things and got yelled by Yusra in the virtual world. Now that she mentioned it, she did seem to be a bit lifeless lately.

"Haruha is scared when sleeping, but Sakura-chan said she's fine to die on the other side-that she should not have existed."

"Unn..... is that so?"

"Haruha, is not a person from that side, so Haruha doesn't know."

That moment she saw Haruha's wilted flower-like face.

For a little.

Just a little, Miharuru thought,

If that "Ghost" Yusra disappears, wouldn't she forget what she said to Haruha that time..... such horrible thoughts.

(Won't that make me an idiot parent.....)

She tried to stop thinking about it and shook her head to the side.

".....Of course not. Even I've hurt someone else before."

"Mommy too? But Mommy is so nice!"

"Haruha, your voice. Too loud."

Haruha gasped and covered her mouth with the stuffed doll as she looked over Yuu's direction. He didn't show any signs of waking up.

To make sure he's asleep, Haruha was about to pinch Yuu's nose but stopped right before she did. After Miharuru told Haruha it's okay through her eyes, Haruha once again faced Miharuru.

"Mommy is such a kind adult, so there's no way Mommy would trouble others."

"Even I'm still a kid. After all, I also have a mother."

"Ee.....? Ah, that's right. Mommy is Mommy's mother's child after all"

"Yes. That's why even I..... am not doing well at school."

Haruha appeared to be in shock. Yuu and Miharuru are humans who were born in the real world after all, so she believed that it's because they are adults that it was okay for them to go outside.

"I lied to my classmate..... ermm, friends who study alongside with me I mean."

She kept secret of her relationship with Yuu and she couldn't resolve the misunderstanding the love-story loving girls were having. Not to mention, she couldn't also let anyone know about Haruha.

Can such a liar-self make new friends? Even if she could, could such friend made under so many layers of lies be considered a friend?

All of these reminded her of her father who disappeared from her sight for the sake of a woman other than her mother. Her father who lied to his family and marriage. As a daughter of such a person, Miharuru wanted to live as honest as possible. But in the end, she became a member of said family of liars.

Probably, because she herself was such a liar, she couldn't trust other people, suspecting that they were lying to her. She suspected them to be like her father who disappeared all of the sudden and her mother who found other people who are more precious than Miharuru. She was afraid of being betrayed by anyone she loves.

Maybe she wouldn't have to worry so much like this in 《Crystal World》, the world without lies.

"Lie.....? Lie is something other than the truth right?"

"Yes. Somewhat, it is like that."

It's lonely to be alone. [Editor's note: HRNNNGGHHH!]

But, she's that afraid to be so close to others that they could look into each other's hearts.

She wanted others to accept Yuu.

But, at the same time she didn't want them to get close to Yuu.

Fuyufu was a good partner for Yuu, who's a nice person albeit quite sloppy.

But.....

But when everything was the truth then everything was also lie. Inside Miharu's heart there was also a ghost like Yusra, it might find its main self to be shameless.

".....I'm, bad with socializing with other people after all, and when I'm in trouble, I lie. Haruha who can get along with Kanna-san so fast is way better."

Squeeze Haruha hugged Miharu.

"You see, Mommy. Sakura said this once."

A person who is strong against anything is creepy. It's more human-like to have weakness. No matter what Mommy did to her friends, Haruha, will still love Mommy"

".....Thank you. I'm proud of Haruha who, even though you said something terrible to Kanna-san, is repenting about it."

Miharu then hugged Haruha as well. Miharu's who was a small girl was completely wrapped by her arm. When she was little, Miharu was also a kid who could burrow herself into her mother or father's arms.

That's right. If both Haruha and I were children, then we could just grow up together. Yuu..... might get left out. However, he would surely catch up in a hurry.

With such whimsical thought, her heart naturally calmed down.

"Let's meet Kanna-san again and apologize to her."

"Unn!"

"Then, let's sleep shall we. We must wake up early tomorrow after all."

"Kaaay~....."

Haruha obediently nodded and Miharu stroke her head as she closed her eyes.
(I should work hard too.....)

The darkness of the summer night made her sweat. And so she loosened the button of her sleepwear.

—It's not that he opened his eyes, but Kasugai Yuu heard Miaru and Haruha's conversation. He heard from the boundary of dream and reality.

It was raining over there. He heard Miharuru and Haruha's whispering voice alongside the sound of the rain.

Hated..... scary..... die..... Mommy is so nice!

Haruha's lisping voice. She had quite a large vocabulary and her pronunciation was not bad, but it's only been a few months since she was born. Even though she knows the word, she still doesn't fully understand it yet.

Come to think of it, when Fuyufu was little, she knew a lot of words but her pronunciation was that of a kid.

"Listen, Yuu-kun. It's simple. Because the chocolate Manjuu I've been saving disappeared, and Yuu-kun's hands are all sticky, so..."

Starting then, Yuu's lie no longer worked on Fuyufu. That's why he could easily lie without any worries. Fuyufu's mother, on the other hand, was such a kind person that she would innocently accept whatever he said to her. He couldn't carelessly lie to her out of playfulness. 『A snack disappearing by itself? How curious, I wonder if a cat came and stole it?』. By the way you mustn't feed chocolate to cat.

And with that lie he had said out of whim to Fuyufu's mother, he made Fuyufu cry once. It was the first and last Fuyufu's crying face he saw. That time onwards, Yuu was determined to never make Fuyufu cry ever again. It was such a painful experience that Yuu too, also cried about.

A face is crying. Rain. All of the sudden, the scene changed. It was from just a while ago. Not even a year into the past.

The pouring rain became curtains that covered the temple corridor they were trapped in, 15 years old Fuyufu, who wore her middle school uniform as replacement of morning clothes, talked to Yuu.

『Why didn't you cry?』

Then he realized.

It's about Kanna Sakura. Today this noon, when Yusra talked about Sakura, the

thing he failed to hear properly, he's reminded of the sense of incompleteness. That thing abruptly took form in that dream.

He might be able to figure it out if he talked with Sakura. The answer to Fuyufu's question that he couldn't answer that time.

Yuu probably needed to ask about it.

—Did you, properly cry?

『Then, let's sleep shall we.』

Maybe because his worry had disappeared, Miharū's whisper reached his ears and his consciousness fall into darkness.

Come to think of it, I still haven't apologized, for making Miharū cry.

Part 13

In the dark.

Groowwwlll

The elevator descends and made sound like a growling stomach.

And then the light turns on. Like spotlight, it stretch from above and light only a spot in the darkness.

“I’m the seventh division chief, Niiro Mansei”

The one who stands below the shaft of light was a man in black who refuse to take off his sunglass even in the dark. He is the researcher who led the production of Haruha in the Human Equilibrium Institute, and also responsible in its management.

Within the pure darkness that cloud over one’s sense of distance, Niiro’s rusty voice echoed.

And as if to answer to it, the second shaft of light tear the darkness.

“It’s rare to hear a call from you instead of the Department of Human Relationship^[16]”

The figure lightened by the light was that of an old man in a white coat. He’s clearly not Japanese. Brown skin and dark-red curly hair, and his eyes were covered by his knife wounds-like wrinkles, he appears to be quite skinny but he’s a sharp old man.

“I thought you have no interest in my humankind?”

His voice was tenacious like a rolling muddy dumpling^[17]. It has the force to stop one’s breath.

“No, Maharl. I expect a lot in Ikui Librium’s ability, as something that will contribute greatly in Nephilim control system improvement”

“What I’m creating is the new humankind. Though it seems you are too fixated on inheriting the current humanity feeling and hate how I use the Gepetto-type”

“If you don’t connect human’s body, intelligence, and all their feeling together there won’t be any proof of human remain”

“There is no need for those that inherits earth to inherit humanity”

Niirou shrugged and Maharl rolled his eyes. The two of them are not free. The two of them are regarded as genius of their own kind, and in the same time they think themselves to be slightly more superior compared to others.

Without that much of arrogance, there’s no way they can create new humanity.

Maharl insert his hand into his white coat pocket and wriggle his finger like spider.

“Let me hear your business. Weren’t you busy managing Haruha and the S Type together?”

“You know right? Ikui have gone too far lately. The 《Crystal World》 she been raising is starting to rise some rumors”

“Hmm. It’s different to Memento’s case. Ikui Librium is just providing those who come to her a place to rest, there is no victim”

“That is the matter of perspective”

“I did hear that we’re receiving some inquiries, but I’m not informed of any complaints though?”

“Because of Ikui Librium, the 『Ghosts』 that appears in 『CtG』 are lamenting”

“I heard of them, but won’t they disappear once we restart the system. They are nothing but mere foam of cache you know”

Niirou’s team has reached to that conclusion already. To restart Nephilim Computer, it’s needed to make preparation several months in advance and large amount of personals and it also comes with high risk. It’s something they want to avoid if possible.

“Even though it’s just simple restart, there’s no way we can do it each time a 『Ghost』 appear. Also, if the number of those 『Ghosts』 keeps increasing, there is no telling what malfunction Nephilim will do with all those emulation being put into their resources

Also, the more human get tuned by Ikui Librium, the more chances outsiders to learn the truth. When that happens, it might hinder our plan”

“It’s the Department of Human Relationship’s job to stop that from happening right. That shows how important this work is”

The old man took out his both hands out of his white coat, and spread it together like wings.

“Listen, Niiro-kun. This is a chance. Possibly the last chance to recreate this humanity that had reached stalemate state and leading towards its own self-destruction”

If Ikui Librium becomes the new world seed, all humans in earth will cooperate together in conjunction to accomplish the same objection.

It’s not that they will become standardized like machines or lose their individuality you know? Like how ants born from the exact same gene, each will live according to their environment and divided into either worker ants or queen ants. Just, we’re making them aware of their position as being a member of a group.

By reviving the ancient language, Ben Yehuda^[18] managed to unite a country, but Ikui Librium will return humans back to their previous form before they even acquire language, they will attain a more advanced form”

“But then Human physiology and sensibility won’t be maintained.

Not only giving up the survival by genetics, if you abandon the inheritance of Culture^[meme]^[19] it won’t be human anymore. Compared to Ikui’s cells, even the 『Ghosts』 are more worthy to salvage”

The sound of Niiro’s voice was somewhat all over the places. But, his gaze towards the old man remains unshaken as if it was frozen in place.

Maharl laughed as if coughing.

“HAH! Well, you’re stubborn as it is. Then, what would you do?”

“As what we had agreed, we will do selection on Ikui Librium who refuses to accept improvement through repetition of failures.

By battle between Hadzar”

“Very well—”

The old man’s reaction towards the declaration of war was short.

“Come”

Finally they negotiate. Under the worse agreement.

“Well”

—In the darkness after the old man had left, Niuro Mansei muttered.

“Though I do understand why he so obsessed with the unification of will”

“Eehh?”

“Maharl’s homeland is under exhaustion after a lot of partition because of a long civil war, and because of the overly frequent conflict between the government and anti-government, the entire country is filled with spies and guerrillas, no telling when and where you will be stabbed both physically and socially.

As result every one of them become paranoid, and what happened was storm of lynchings and betrayal, aiming to attain victory faster than others. Maharl who was going and back from his research institute at other country was accused as traitors and he lost his family at the time”

“That sure is... bitter. What a tragedy. A cruel story like in fairy tale”

“Maharl must’ve thought the same. Humanity must be reshaped down to its core. That’s why he’s trying to turn the world into like Ikui Librium, where no hatred can be born”

“Wonderful! Thinking it like that, won’t that make us the bad guy?”

“But we will do it. He and Haruha will surely lend us their strength. Kasugai-kun feels indebted over what happened in 『CtG』, and fortunately it seems a girl who is deeply connected to him also got caught in this incident”

“Aaa.....Again, I’ll be able to see Onii-san in action.....”

“That’s right. He will surely try to prevent Haruha from fighting Ikui Librium. But, the only reason Kasugai-kun was able to fight equally against a Hadzar was because he’s using the unpredictable bugs. His affinity towards Ikui who can read other people’s train of thought is the worse.

Even so do you think he can win? You”

“Of course, it’s certain.

Onii-san will surely humiliate her by proving she’s unqualified to be the new humanity and kill her”

Inside the darkness of 『CtG』 isolated space, a silver hair drips like a thread. The girl who was talking to Niirou raised her white face.

“After all, he’s Meme’s dear prince on white horse who crushed Meme’s spine with its hoof”

Memento Coppelion who somehow wears girl uniform of Yuu’s school, innocently blushed out of love, and let out a trembling sound that melts into ecstasy.

“.....Aaaa, I wonder what kind of brilliant trick he will use to slaughter Haruha’s enemy this time?”



Translators Notes and References

1. ↑ A character from Moomin. More info:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snufkin>
2. ↑ A sumo technique
3. ↑ In case this sounds weird, it just means that the leaves were clouds in the firm sea of tress in the sky above
4. ↑ Possibly a reference for the golden/yellow road in Wizard of Oz.
5. ↑ From the phrase, “Ugo no Takenoko” which says “After the rain, mushrooms will pop out one after another” meaning things will happen in successions.
6. ↑ The earlier “Ghost” was 幽霊 (Yūrei), combination of 幽 (dim) and 霊 (spirit). The most common Japanese word for ghost, for obvious reason because ghosts are see-through. Meanwhile, this “Ghost” is 亡霊 (Bōrei), combination of 亡 (departed) and 霊 (spirit). Bōrei is the Gothic term for ghost in Japanese, meaning ruined or departed spirit.
7. ↑ That’s our hugging mole Haruha all right.
8. ↑ I changed neck to throat because slitting throats sounds so much cooler than cutting necks while conveying the same meaning.
9. ↑ Formerly “Suttokoi”, refer back to chapter 1.
10. ↑ Rube Goldberg means “ingeniously or unnecessarily complicated in design or construction.”
11. ↑ Not literally “slow”, somewhere along the line of “unskillful”, “stiff”, *etc.*
12. ↑ チョコ no エッグ, literally means Chocolate Egg. An actual real product in Japan.
13. ↑ Most likely based on Mister Gepetto, a puppet master from Pinocchio.
14. ↑ This: 大.
15. ↑ Ikui said “Hajimemashita” (in a way of saying “Let’s start” or “We begin”) instead of “Hajimemashite” (Nice to meet you)
16. ↑ Originally [人続委], though I’m not sure about this one.
17. ↑ To be more accurate, it’s “like a rolling ball of mud” but it’s funnier when translated literally.

18. ↑ A man said to be the driving spirit behind the revival of the Hebrew language in the modern era. Later he became acquainted with the early movement of Zionism and concluded that the revival of the Hebrew language in the Land of Israel could unite all Jews worldwide (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliezer_Ben-Yehuda)
19. ↑ Meme as in “an element of a culture or system of behavior that may be considered to be passed from one individual to another by nongenetic means, especially imitation” in case you don’t know.

Chapter 3: Scanner Friendly

Part 1

“Yaa...wwnn....”

“Sleepy?”

It's the second day of the final exams, and the school was filled with the gloomy screams of the students.

Meanwhile, Fuyufu was sitting in the corner of the school cafeteria during its shortened business hours trying to hold down a big yawn. Having seen her in the spot, Yuu decided to call her from behind.

After taking a sideward glance, Fuyufu wordlessly redirected her eyes back to her terminal screen.

“It sure is rare.”

Fuyufu was wearing glasses. She started wearing one entering third year of middle school, and only wore it during class. It seems she's in the middle of studying for the exam.

Speaking of rare, it's also rare for Fuyufu to stay up late studying. Normally she would properly listen to the lessons in class and remain composed even during this time of the year.

Unable to bear the awkward silence, Fuyufu faced Yuu and asked,

“...Do you need something from me?”

“Aaa..... well, how should I say it... I have something to talk to you about.”

Despite feeling a bit embarrassed saying that, Yuu sat in front of Fuyufu face-to-face.

Just a hunch, but he knew. Ikui Librium. It didn't seem the negotiations Niiro talked about would work well.

As someone who had faced her directly, he knew that there's something similar between her and Memento. She's not as violent, but their behavior as intelligent being was similar. She never once hesitated, and was willing to do anything to achieve her goal. But it's hard for him to believe that a heartless person like her was related to Haruha.

Before the situation changed any further, he must make his decision.

"Fuyufu... what do you think a lie is? Is it something that is better not existing?"

".....As random as always. Don't you have to study or something?"

"Not really."

Although he said as such, he knew he would have to face makeups for his weak subjects.

Fuyufu then moved towards him and said,

"That."

"? — Nnn!?"

He ended up letting out a strange voice as his nose was pulled by Fuyufu.

"Look, your nose grows."

"Just what are you doing?"

Yuu bent his back and managed to escape from the grasp of his childhood friend. In contrast to the confused Yuu, Fuyufu's stares were cold.

"Have you heard of Pinocchio? A doll cursed to have his nose grow every time he lies.

—You were lying right, when you said you didn't have to study."

"Uuh....."

Unsurprisingly, she saw through him.

"Since you were little, Yuu..... every time something bad happened, you always come to me asking for advice."

Yuu did not answer. In other words, he did not deny that.

Around the age of 10, Yuu had a fight with his friends at school, grumbling about how he couldn't win in games, about his mother, and the fact that every time he found things got hard, he would always come to rely on Fuyufu. Sometimes then, Fuyufu would talk about the stories from the book she read.

And as he listened to her, he would feel relaxed.

“And in the end you always fall asleep, it irritates me.”

“I’m sorry..... I won’t sleep anymore, okay.”

When he’s tired, listening to Fuyufu’s stories helped him to sleep peacefully. To add, Fuyufu seemed to be enjoying her time quoting the words she got from the books she read. So he thought it was okay.

“Well... that’s okay though. It’s not the first time you acted like that after all.”

Fuyufu then switched her terminal into sleep mode, took off her glasses and faced Yuu.

“.....First off, let me ask, what do you think a lie is?”

“That is..... something that is not the truth, maybe.”

“Then what is the truth?”

“A-A fact.....?”

“Then what is fact?”

“.....Reality? No, it’s basically the same— then, something that actually happens, something that is actually experienced, maybe?”

“Still too weak of an answer. If you put it that way, misunderstandings and illusions are neither truth nor fact. But, for the person itself it’s not a lie, not a false.

— So a fact is?”

“.....A matter..... that everyone, without exclusion, recognize as truth.... h-how about that?”

“Then, everything other than that is a lie, is that what you’re saying?”

“Errrm, if it’s not the truth and unclear..... yes, a lie.”

Yuu nodded and Fuyufu followed suit.

“Then that’s your answer and nothing else.”

Somehow— Yuu felt restless.

“Wait, but, how about tricks, swindles, or betrayals, or lies to escape from reality... there so many of them. Do you think we are better off without them?”

This should have been an unnatural question, but Fuyufu replied instantly.

“Those are lies used as tools to fulfill one’s motive, right? It’s the same as when someone uses a glass ashtray as a murder weapon in a murder suspense drama.

It’s not about what’s wrong, but rather when it becomes wrong.”

Yuu was confused. He understood what Fuyufu was trying to say. But, he was misled by what the 《Crystal World》 referred to as a “World without lie”. As he thought about it, he asked again.

“But..... there’s also 『mistake』 in lies right? Don’t you think the world will be a better place without misunderstandings and misconceptions—”

“Yuu.”

She called his name and Yuu slowly stopped his tired tongue from moving. Then he realized that hearing Fuyufu defending the existence of lies disturbed him more than it should.

After patiently waiting for Yuu to settle, Fuyufu quietly continued.

“There might be some misunderstanding between you and your mother, Yuu. Maybe you two weren’t able to fully understand each other. But that was maybe because both you and your mother were just simply lying to yourselves, unable to honestly say that you two wanted to be with each other.

But, this sadness of yours comes from the death of your mother, not because there’s fault in both of your ways.”

Fuyufu should already know why Yuu came to see her. Even if she didn’t know about the incident in 『CtG』, she knew what the words that Yuu wanted to hear the most.

So that’s why he spoiled himself to her. [TL: Originally それに甘えて、逆らった。]

though I'm not sure what it supposed to mean in this context.]

"But if it's not wrong, then how come both my mother and I live such lonely lives?"

"If your mother was still alive, the two of you would surely laugh over that misunderstanding and would get along with each other after that. I guarantee it."

".....How come you can be so sure about it?"

"After all, both of you love each other. I've been by your side for a very long time now so I know.

Those feelings are what are important, that's why even now you still love your mother, right? If it's truly a mistake, if you truly don't feel that way, you wouldn't try so hard to remember her, much less be troubled by it."

".....Fuyufu"

Fraying around the edges, he let out a miserable voice. Even so, Yuu simply continued to look at Fuyufu.

"To sum it up..... what you are trying to say is....."

He felt embarrassed over what he had just said. Fuyufu averted her eyes and said.

"No lies and no mistakes—

Trying to be perfect in a relationship is bullsh*t is what I'm saying."

Kasugai Yuu let out a huge laughter, totally ignoring the publics' eyes.

It's precisely what she said.

But during all this time, Yuu did not notice.

That one female student was watching him. A girl with her friends, who just happened to be there to buy a green tea that only sold at the vending machine at the school cafeteria.

She was Kugimiya Miharuru.

The other three did not notice Yuu. But as they played with with their newly

bought canned drink, they noticed that Miharuru had just simply stopped walking.

After she opened her can, Tsukami asked.

“What is it, master?”

But the one she asked was disorientated, confused after seeing Kodzuchi Fuyufu happily talking with Yuu with such a defenseless face that she had never seen before. Miharuru could only flinch, reacting to Tsukami’s voice.

Tsukami was startled.

“...!? W-why do you look like you are about to cry?”

“Aa, no..... I’m okay.”

After finally getting hold of herself, Miharuru hurriedly walked with a quick pace. What kind of face was I’m making? What made me so nervous? The canned green tea she had in her hand suddenly felt cold, so she put it in her bag.

Tsukami, Nogi, and Rokkaku looked at each other and then followed Miharuru.

After finally arriving to the shoe locker, Miharuru finally stopped.

“What happened? Is there something wrong?”

Tsukami asked worriedly. She was seriously concerned for her. Hearing that, Miharuru felt pain in her chest.

“Tsukami-san..... Nogi-san, Rokkaku-san. Do you mind hearing me out?”

“Eh? Aa, yes...”

Feeling something was wrong, the three of them then stood side-by-side and waited for Miharuru’s words.

Miharuru took a deep breath, exhaled, then timidly told them.

“A-Actually, I... am not a love master”

“Wha-.....!?”

Her confession was a shock to Tsukami.

“W-What do you mean, master.....?”

“I mean..... I never, had, a boyfriend... or anything like that.”

“Eeeeh!? T-Then, what about that time when you talked about 『100 bad things about my boy friend』 or when you accidentally said 『I don't know what to do with that when cleaning the bath』 and others, all of those were lies!?”

“Actually, I'm really bad dealing with men.....”

“Aaah, come to think of it you barely talk with the boys, don't you?”

“I've seen you talk with Idiot-kun, but well, your seats are close to each other so it's inevitable, I guess.”

Nogi and Rokkaku seemed to accept her confession rather easily. But Tsukami was different.

“What didn't you tell us sooner.....?”

She asked as she stared at Miharuru.

“I-I'm sorry for kind of deceiving you girls.....”

Miharuru apologized, but Nogi gave her a hand-chop.

“There's no need to apologize. To be blunt, it's also our fault for having this misunderstanding.

Tsukami aside, we somewhat figured that out ourselves.”

“I-Is that so.....?”

“We had our doubts when we saw you, Kugimiya-san, avoiding boys every time you pass by them on the hall. It's unlikely such a timid girl would date a guy so far as to live with him. To add, your stories kind of messed up. From time to time, you talk about a kid and all.

Or more like, it's hard to believe that a guy, who would name his child after the name of his ex-girlfriend, and who you said is a girl with a really bad personality, would exist.”

Rokkaku smiled a little and fixed the position of her glasses.

“Eeeh..... if you knew, then just please say so!”

To begin with, Nogi and Rokkaku weren't as angry as Tsukami. After knowing that, all the tension left Miharuru, but then another fear struck.

Could it be that her friends were making fun of her inside as they listened to her eventful life stories —Although it's mostly complaints about her life with Yuu—. That might had been the case.

As she thought about that, she got worried. But she also realized that although tiring, she enjoyed all of those times she spent with them, and because she was so afraid of losing it, she didn't even try to clear the misunderstanding.

Her past-self would most likely stop there and let the misunderstanding continue. But now as she had Haruha who looked up to her, standing still was no longer an option.

“Errm..... if you knew from the start, then why did you let me talk about it?”

Nogi and Rokkaku then went “Eee.....” and looked at each other. Then, they both laughed.

“After all, it's seemed interesting of course.”

“Yes. I really like that weird couple that comes in Kugimiya-san's stories.

It makes me want to cheer them on.”

It as if she got lifted up to the sky. Miharun unconsciously stood on her toes. So this was what it felt like being happy, she thought.

“W-Well, my Kurino-kun is not as awful as master's boyfriend (provisional) though.”

“Like we said, he's not yours.”

.....

And so the topic got derailed, and they ended up talking about how Tsukami would get Kurino, who only thought about the club rather than her. In the end they didn't talk about the exam because Tsukami wished to forget about it.

“Oooh, so there's that! As expected from master, so tricky!”

“I'm neither master nor tricky.....”

She felt a strange pain in her chest when she witnessed that scene back in the cafeteria, but as if someone had just pulled out the big nail that was piercing her chest, she now felt slightly bit better.

Part 2

“.....So you’re saying that I’m a fake created by the『CtG』 computer?”

That night.

Haruha, Clamp, Mifa, and one more person went to the spot where the “Ghosts” were hiding. They said that they regularly changed places, but they hadn’t moved elsewhere since yesterday.

Clamp and three others took Yusra somewhere else, away from the rest of the “Ghosts” and briefed her on the truth of this case.

By the way, the rest of the “Ghosts” were circling around one of Clamp’s conspicuous companion.

A moving and talking giant mushroom doll.

“C-Could it be you’re that famous wilderness kidnapper, Paya The Kid!?”

“I heard he got petrified by a Basilisk in the desert, though.”

“Indeed, something did turn into a stone and was scattered——”

Payakino made sure everyone was looking at itself before it continued.

“The Basilisk, it was!”

BOO!

With the stylish mushroom joke, the “Ghosts” who had only little exposure to entertainment — even though they were in a game — in their life burst out laughing.

Yusra listened to their laughter from afar and changed her wording.

“In other words, we can’t go back..... or more like, to begin with, we never had a place to return to..... is that it?”

“Yes..... I’ve met Kanna in the real world, but her personality is different.”

Clamp decided to reveal everything and talked about the stuff that happened in the real world. At first, he thought she would be mad, but it looked like she

seemed rather relieved instead. She didn't say it out loud, but she's happy that her family won't be worried.

After that, Clamp moved on to the main topic.

"But there is a way to fix it. According to those who created Ikui, it's possible to return those victims back to normal with Ikui's power."

"There is no way she would do that right....."

"That's why we have to defeat her."

Yuu(Clamp)'s tone was of one which Sakura(Yusra) had never heard from him before. A sharp and heavy tone.

"I'll explain the details later, but if Ikui is defeated by a force weaker than her, her willpower..... no, her identity will be lost. When that happens, she will surely acknowledge that you guys are the victims and return you back to normal."

That was what Niiro Mansei had told him after he had just returned from school, the method to solve this case. In the end, the negotiations ended in failure — what a useless old man, Yuu thought —, but it appeared that he managed to make a deal in which Ikui would return all the players she recruited back to normal.

But of course, that only applied if Haruha managed to win in a battle against Ikui.

"When that time comes..... what will happen to us?"

"『CtG』 will be able to register you and your main body as one individual, and you will... disappear. But, it's possible to pass on your memory to the main body.

In a sense, it will be like getting back your body."

Transportation and integration of memory. It's possible through the technology Haruha used to pass her personality to her real world body. According to Hajime, who spent all night making preparations for it, the chances of it succeeding was very high, even higher than when used by Hadzar.

Quite unexpectedly, Yusra believed him very easily. The days she spent trapped inside a game was quite unbearable it seemed, as the lack of need to eat and the sensation of being immortal can even drive someone insane.

“It’s just...” Yusra looked down.

“Do I even have a place to return?”

“What do you mean?” asked Mifa.

“The other Yusra..... though I’ve only seen her from afar, looked very quiet and calm, and isn’t as rough as me.

In the real world, rather than a sulky faced and half-assed person like me, a person like her who can get along and be friendly with others is better.”

“That.....”

Mifa was about to say something but she stopped. She, in the real world was very timid and had no confidence. She understood Sakura(Yusra)’s feelings more than others, as she was a person who behaved the opposite of her counterpart in 『CtG』just like her.

“Especially in my family where my father was an active police, it’s better for a troublemaker daughter like me to never return.”

Yusra tried to smile, but she failed and it came out awkwardly instead.

Yuu recalled Sakura’s past that he heard from the other Yusra. She had lost the thing she poured her life into and was trapped in negative emotions stemmed from how miserable she was.

As someone who knew about her circumstances, Clamp was the one who should had spoken out first, but the first one to move was Haruha.

“Tooouh!”

She jumped and hugged Yusra all of the sudden. Yusra lowered her hips in the process. Haruha then placed her hand on Yusra’s ear and whispered.

“You see, Sakura-chan.”

She spoke in a low voice, she wanted to do a secret talk. Clamp and Mifa looked at them with blank faces.

“What is it..... just speak normally.”

“It’s a secret talk so no.”

“Secret.....?”

“Un. Actually, Haruha is not daddy and mommy’s child.”

“Well, of course.....”

She accidentally said that loudly, but then she realized. Just what she is. Why she acted as the child of these two high school student. Even though her skills were so awful in the real world, in this virtual world she’s the unstoppable OKG.

There’s no way she’s just a ‘normal’ child.

“Haruha was born inside this game, Haruha is daddy and mommy’s fake child. That’s why, Haruha thought it’s impossible for Haruha to become Sumo-san or idol in the future.

But it’s no good to say that. Daddy said he will no longer be daddy if Haruha say that. Haruha want to continue to be daddy and mommy’s child, so Haruha must behave like a real child.

That’s why, Haruha’s lies are secret.”

“You..... you think, such thing..... is actually possible?”

Her story was hard to believe, but in a sense, Yusra herself was just like her, a person who had no connections with the real world. Then, she remembered.

『Haruha, Haruha is not a human after all.』

『But Haruha can’t eat things like asparagus. When Haruha chew it, Haruha goes uggeee』

In matter of fact, Haruha was not human, but she worried so much about having food that she didn’t like. Rather than thinking that as a simple personal preference, all differences she had with others made her believe that she herself was not human.

And such clumsy girl was now trying her hardest to cheer up Sakura(Yusra).

“Daddy and mommy said they will be with Haruha even if Haruha is not a human. Daddy and mommy would accompany Haruha in bed, and even when they want to study for exam, they will still hold Haruha’s hand..... Ah, but daddy forgot to buy Haruha a Choko no Egg.”

Strange. Even though the story was cut halfway, she got what Haruha was trying to say.

“That’s why, unlike Haruha who is not a real human, a real human like Sakura-chan will surely be able to go back home.

For sure, Sakura-chan’s daddy and mommy will do huggy wuggy with Sakura-chan.”

Part 3

“It feels like eavesdropping so I’m not sure whether to feel bad about it...”

Haruha spoke in a low voice so that Clamp and the rest wouldn’t hear, but it was loud enough for the two people near her in the real world to hear. The black coffin-like Ramiel Haruha is currently mounting on has the function to project all her actions for observation purposes. Of course, it also includes her voice

Hajime felt slightly guilt, but Niirō was smiling out of amusement.

“Hajime-kun, have you heard of Frankenstein’s story?”

“Eh? Aaa..... I’ve only seen the movie about it”

To be precise, it’s the story about a student named Frankenstein who used human corpses to create an artificial human.

But, after seeing the monster he has created, Frankenstein felt regret and decided to run away leaving the monster alone. Abandoned by his father, the monster felt lonely and chased after Frankenstein and asked him to create another one of his kin. But after Frankenstein rejected his request, the monster went and killed all of Frankenstein’s friends and loved ones—

“In that story, the monster did not kill Frankenstein’s loved ones for revenge. Rather, he did so because he wanted to be forgiven by Frankenstein”

“? What does that mean?”

“The monster has no parents, a person who serves as his guide, so he doesn’t know how to forgive or how to love someone. The only thing he knew was the thing that his father did to him, and that was to isolate him. That’s why he killed Frankenstein’s family and made him alone.

What the monster wanted was to be forgiven by Frankenstein. With that, the monster will be able to learn the act of 『Forgiveness』 from his father. But Frankenstein hated the monster.

Therefore, the monster was unable to earn forgiveness from the father he pined for the most, and continue to suffer as he disappears”

Unsure of whether it was really that kind of story, Hajime couldn't find the connection between it and the talk Haruha and Yusra had a while ago.

Knowing full well what Hajime was thinking, Niiro continues.

“What Haruha attempted to do is the opposite.

A monster such as herself was forgiven, so there's no way a decent human like her would not be forgiven. Her way of thinking is too simple, it's clear that she has not fully understood the concept of being human, therefore she's so interesting.

Well, well—”

Niiro laughed as he played around with the bridge of his sunglasses.

“She sure is a lovable monster”



Part 4

“.....That’s enough”

Yusra interrupted and stretched her back. Her sigh falls on Haruha’s head.

“I get what you wanted to say, but you’re making no sense”

“You sounds weird, Sakura-chan!”

“Look who’s talking..... or more like, come to think of it, unlike you I’m a delinquent. Even if I don’t have a place to go back to, I’ll just do as I like and wonder off somewhere”

She said cheerfully and placed her hand on Haruha’s head. Haruha looked up to her with a blank face.

“You know; you are definitely unfit to be a sumo player”

“Unn.....”

“But, maybe you can be an idol instead”

Haruha made the brightest smile yet.

“Aa..... un! Haruha will do her best to practice handshaking!”

“Oi, go apologize for that stupid misunderstanding about being a idol!”

Haruha pursued Yusra to hug her and Yusra tried to peel her away.

Clamp and Mifa glanced at each other and smiled.

It seems their child finally made a friend.

—The “Ghosts” showed various reactions regarding their current situation after they were informed by Yusra.

There were those who couldn’t accept that they’re the fake one, and there are those who were relieved that they’re not troubling their parents. But most can’t even decide how to react to the situation.

Later, after hearing Clamp’s request, around 40% of them agreed. Looking at the number alone, only a few dozen were willing to cooperate.

『Please cooperate with me to defeat Ikui, in the other word, to takeover Crystal Hotel』

That was his request. The “Ghosts” original plan was to have OKG(Haruha) to kill Ikui, so it also works in their favor.

『Ikui Librium is basically a hacker who illegally used hypnosis and did Avatar replication, but since the administrators doesn't have any evidence they can't make a move.

Clamp and his group made a promise with Ikui, if they able to defeat Ikui who's hiding inside Crystal Hotel she will return all the victims back to normal and disband 《Crystal World》』

That's how that scenario goes. It's a lie to have them to cooperate without telling them about the Hadzar. It's painful to keep secrets in this situation, but Yuu was already determined to do anything to protect Haruha's life.

But since it's still quite an unbelievable story, no one believed them, but around 40% of the “Ghosts” thought that they didn't have any other options so they choose to cooperate. It's way more than what Yuu predicted. It seemed that a lot of “Ghosts” believes that even if this is a trap, things won't get any worse.

Well then....

As far as they know, the target Ikui Librium has never stepped foot outside Crystal Hotel since the first time she started recruiting people.

Hajime said it's too bothersome to confirm, but she hypothesized that Ikui who stayed inside 『CtG』 24/7 has already deeply rooted herself inside that transparent fortress.

Their victory condition is to defeat Ikui, and their defeat condition is failing to defeat Ikui before the deadline.

Since Ikui confined herself inside, there's no other option but to raid her place.

Haruha offered to go in by herself, but was refused instantly. Everything will end if Ikui got her hands on Haruha, so having Haruha to serve as the vanguard is not an option.

To begin with, a《Crystal World》warrior is practically invincible in indoor places like Crystal Hotel thanks to their perfect formations and linked movements. Even with Haruha's strength, it's uncertain whether she can win against their number.

“I have a plan”

After looking at the face of their allies— Not just Yusra, but also Anzu and Ren is among them— Clamp voiced his scheme.

“We will first cause a distraction inside and charge in, as the rest of you hold back the masked men, I will go straight to Ikui and defeat her”

“.....What a plan, Ikui can read minds can't she.....?”

Ren with her braids hanging from underneath her hood expressed her concern.

“Forget about getting inside, they should be able to read our minds just from getting close to the building”

Clamp nodded and ascertained.

“The only one who can read minds is just Ikui. That's why there's a way.

So everyone, please hold back the masked men for me till I defeat Ikui.”

After that Clamp explained his plan in greater detail and adjusted it alongside the others.

By the way,

“.....He's wicked as always.”

That was Yusra's first thought after hearing Clamp's plan. Mifa nodded in agreement.

The “Ghosts” who had their armor stripped off them were given equipment Clamp bought with his own money, and they adjusted themselves with their new weapons and equipment.

Haruha was allowed to participate under the condition of only supporting from the rear.

—Thus, the curtain of the fight between Haruha and Ikui Librium, and their kin will now fall.

Part 5

—If a shadow passed through your body as you looked at the moon above, it's undoubtedly her mischief.

The vast forest swallowed by iridescent light was the reflection of ancient time, the entrance to infinity.

That was a place filled with overwhelming force of magic. You were tied by its law, and she had casted her spell on you.

She, who was playing under the moonlight, would soon be referred to as a witch.

And you, who were enchanted by her, would be laughed by the fairies and feel discomfort.

It was the seeker of truth's dark night. The night of pilgrims' memorial vigil festival that mystified the world.

That was the magicians' other side of the rainbow,

Its name was Wizards' Glaive—

The next day.

Brandt, a masked swordsman with the number『41』 and also a member of《Crystal World》, exited Raiankarydi's church. Using a teleportation item to teleport himself to the guild base, he then hurriedly entered the Crystal Hotel.

Brandt was a college student. After receiving an e-mail delivered from the Ramiel to his mobile terminal, he left the evening laboratory and hurriedly logged into 『CtG』with the Ramiel at the boarding house.

In the mail was the news that the hotel had been attacked today and that he should solidify their defenses. The sender was †Noat†, the number 『1』, under Ikui Librium's orders.

Brandt's thoughts were simple. Just do what he felt.

Ikui Librium's thoughts were supposedly the mix of a vast number of different

individuals' desires; the final piece for humanity's ascension and the holder of truths. And he who synchronised with it was able to take the best course of action in any situation just by relying on his intuition.

As long it's not unreasonable, he would obediently respond to Ikui Librium's calls. He would simply execute any orders without a second thought. To remind himself of that, he put on his mask.

The moment Brandt arrived, 32 of 《Crystal World》 members had already assembled. They must've arrived here earlier to station themselves as guards.

Crystal Hotel was a four story high long tower with a 400 square meter sized ground floor. There were no gates. It's because, regardless of whether they were a guest or enemy, there was no need for them to reject anyone. There were also no kinds of furniture inside, but on the ground floor there were training dummies made of wood lined up.

Anyhow, since the floors were also made out of crystal, just by looking up, he could see the situation above. There were eight people on the third floor. He could see the footwear of his comrades and their long-nosed masks.

And on the fourth floor, which was the highest floor of the tower, was their leader, Ikui Librium, her aide, †Noa†, and two of their highest leveled magic warriors.

Brandt heard from †Noa†, the number 『1』, that Ikui Librium was Hadzar, who was a miracle existence who obtained a body in this virtual world and if she ever got a game over she would not be able to return here. Also, if they lost her, they wouldn't be able to maintain 《Crystal World》 anymore.

The frustration of not being able to show result in collage, the feeling of inferiority towards his more talented underclassman, and the strong pressure from his teachers; this place had saved him from all of those. That's why; Brandt must protect the key to this equilibrium crystal world no matter what.

In this world without lie, the concept of truth didn't exist. That's why, it's so kind.

“.....Something is coming.”

Murmured the girl with the mask numbered 『44』, Yusra. Hearing her, he

pulled himself together.

In the direction of where she was looking, past the front side of the hotel's crystal walls, dozens of Avatars showed up. The majority of their displayed data seen through AR Mode appeared to be broken. They were "Ghosts" that were born after they synchronized with Ikui Librium.

It seemed that Brandt's "Ghost" was not among them. He didn't know why but all members of 《Crystal World》 felt hostility towards the "Ghosts". They instinctively wanted to destroy them, especially their own "Ghost". Because of that, they had fought against them several times already, but this was the first time the other side chose to attack first.

So, it seemed that today's raid was about them. Brandt stopped thinking any further and proceeded to take action as the number『41』— though all he did was just holding his weapon. Crystal Hotel was much sturdier than it looked. To begin with, the strength of《Crystal World》 depended on how Ikui Librium was able to immediately anticipate and counter even the opponent's most bizarre of strategies.

That's why there was neither need for uneasiness nor room for lies in this transparent chamber.

With a crystal-clear mind, Brandt began to chant the 《Acceleration(Accelerate)》spell in preparation to repel the attackers...

But then his whole torso burst open and flew off.

That moment— In other words, the moment 『41』's upper half swelled up like a pumpkin and exploded, the masked Yusra heard the screams of the masked『1』, †Noa†, who was supposedly be protecting Ikui Librium, but had just now come down by elevator.

"Everyone, distance yourselves from those who just now arrived from Raiankarydi!

There are some kind of explosive hidden inside their body!"

However when that comment was made, Yusra's mask was already dyed red by the fresh blood of their comrade. 『41』's remains looked akin to a sticky anemone.

“H..... human bomb.....!?”

“Great— it’s time to go!”

Under Clamp’s command, all members of the Ikui subjugation squad dashed and entered the Crystal Hotel.

Out of the blue, the crystal clear glass tower that was beautifully reflecting light a few minutes ago were now dyed red with blood. It’s all because the Avatars who unknowingly entered the tower with a bomb planted somewhere within their body exploded one after another.

“Oaaah..... I did ask for their cooperation, but this is way too gruesome.....”

The “Ghost” Yusra clamped her mouth with her hand to hold herself from vomiting. Approaching closer to the tower, she could see the bits of brains and organs sliding down the bloody wall. It must have been the remains of corpses of people that recently leaned on it.

The trick to it was surprisingly easy. All they had to do was, just wait for a masked avatar come out from the Raiankarydi church and ambush them. Afterwards, with ‘item installation coordinate’ bug, they planted a bomb trap within their bodies that would explode when magic was activated.

Normally one would notice when a bomb was planted within their body. But due to 『CtG』 specification, the condition of one’s stomach was based upon the player’s body in the real world so no one would realize when anything was put within their virtual stomach.

All that was left was to let the《Crystal World》members to get into battle fervor. Since they’re within Wizards’ Glaive ground, there was no doubt that all the players here could use support magic.

The biggest advantage of this method was that people who brought the trap themselves had no knowledge about it so even Ikui Librium wasn’t be able to sense it.

Frankly speaking, among the 30 people stationed within the hotel, only 5 of them had the bomb planted within them, but it’s enough to bring 《Crystal World》into panic.

The moment Yusra rushed into the hotel, she could see that the remaining masked men were dumbfounded. They had just witnessed the lifeless corpses(mannequin) pieces of their fallen comrades that was drowning in the sea of blood disintegrate with the explosion.

Before the opponents could recover, Clamp and Mifa quickly advanced up to the upper floor. After they defeated the masked men hindering their path, they climbed aboard the elevator leading to the top floor.

“Dammit!”

But, because of that, the masked man recovered instantly. Before, they couldn’t move, they were paranoid over who planted those bombs and what triggered them to explode. However, it was nothing compared to the fact that they’re now in the dire situation where Ikui was going to be killed. That realization itself reminded them that there was no time to waste dumbfounded.

“I won’t let you.....!”

The shadow that chased after Clamp and his friends was the mask number 『44』— the real Yusra. She tried to get into the closing elevator door with bullet-like speed, but...

Suddenly she was tackled from her side and taken down before she was able to reach the door.

“Your opponent... is me!!!”

Wearing the exact same equipment as the real one, the “Ghost” Yusra wore a savage and maniacal smile on her face and fell into a stance.

“With you as my opponent... finally, I won’t have to run away from anything in this game anymore, right!!?”

Provoked, 『44』 stood up. “Ghost” Yusra could feel a strong hatred flaring up behind the mask.

There were people prepared to ambush them on the third floor, but the elevator Clamp and others rode went pass the third floor and safely reached the top floor.

On the third floor, Payakino, who bravely clung the outer wall like a slug,

wielded a witch-ish broom and used it to defeat her enemies. Despite being awfully outnumbered, Payakino put up a good fight thanks to the tremendous impact of the element of surprise. It looked like Payakino was able to hold them down for a while.

The instant the elevator door opened, Mifa whispered.

“In here, I can help, so I’ll go too.”

Since the door opened immediately, Clamp had no time to think over what she said. Though he might have anticipated that she would say that.

And, the one waiting for them on the top floor was their target Ikui and the two bodyguards who cut off both of Clamp’s legs the other day. They had already unsheathed their swords.

The two bodyguards had already cast their 《Acceleration(Accelerate)》 magic. Aided by a pair of lightning orbs, the two of them were ready and charged straight towards Clamp and Mifa.

The bodyguards were both experienced players and were of course many levels higher than Mifa and even Clamp.

If they take even a step outside the elevator they would instantly had turned into minced meat.

“.....”

In such situation, Ikui, who might’ve read Clamp’s thoughts, opened her mouth.

“One should not go.”

Those words were for the two knights and were why Clamp stepped outside without even waiting for her to finish her words.

Reflexively—because Ikui failed to stop them in time—The two knights rushed forward.

The one who took the next action was none other than the person standing diagonally behind Clamp, Mifa, who had just finished her magic chant(charge).. What she cast was the same 《Acceleration(Accelerate)》 that the knights cast, but was directed towards Clamp. The orbs of lightning that exhibited great

buffing effect ran towards Clamp.

And the《Magic Reflection(Reflect Magic)》 that she cast on Clamp in advance repelled the bulbs and they flew in all directions.

And that support magic hit one of the knights. Naturally the knight paid no heed to that. Not only did support magic not give any damage at all, it was actually increasing his speed— but, in the next moment.

“Nngh!?”

The knight, whose movement got accelerated beyond his imagination, couldn’t control his direction and hit the wall before he could attack Clamp. *Crash...* the heavy noise from the impact echoed.

He hit the wall headfirst, broke his neck and became a lifeless corpse.

The other knight drove towards Clamp, but the attack he unleashed was stopped by Clamp’s single-edged sword(Scaramax).. He might have been startled from the unexpected loss of comrade.

Mifa once again used 《Acceleration(Accelerate)》 and like before, it was repelled by Clamp. The knight who he was fighting with couldn’t avoid it. Therefore, he reflexively took a back step.

But that was a mistake.

“What!?”

Having only managed a half-assed escape, Clamp, who did not let the chance slide, quickly penetrated the base of his neck with his blade.

That was when Mifa had casted offensive magic in the form of wind blades, crippling the rest of his endurance value(Hit Point) and turning him into a mannequin.

Ikui, who had till now just watched her two guards being defeated by such bizarre methods, muttered as she read what’s inside Clamp’s head.

“I see. You’re utilizing the bug that allows the same magic to overlap with each other. Same instances of support magic normally won’t overlap with each other, but the magic that got reflected by 《Magic Reflection(Reflect Magic)》 has a different registry ID to non-reflected ones and so the game takes it as different

kind of magic and allow it to overlap.”

《Acceleration(Accelerate)》 was a magic that require considerable amount of skill to begin with, overlapping it would make one accelerate as fast as a race machine. And of course, being in such a state, one would be driven into a panic and caused an accident.

It’s obvious that no one would cast support magic on their ally who had 《Magic Reflection(Reflect Magic)》 on, so no one who played the game normally would figure this out.

(I’m amazed how he found these bugs one after another..... He said it’s due to his mother’s programming habit though.)

Thought Mifa as she let out a sigh.

“Iku thought the same. But Iku did not think that Kasugai Yuu’s attachment to his mother was anything remarkable.”

Receiving unexpected agreement, she got Goosebumps. She heard about her already, but it’s amazing how she was able to read other person’s thought so accurately.

Even now, could it be she’s reading all countermeasures they prepared for her.....?

“Well then..... Check!”



Along with Clamp's shout as he faced his sword towards Ikui, Mifa felt even more nervous than the time she fought Memento.

Not yet. The crucial part started now.

“Ukyaaaa!?”

Anzu had a large build, but her scream was cute.

Not long ago she was wildly crushing the enemies with the hammer she wielded, but once the 《Crystal World》 members got hold of themselves again, she was quickly pushed back.

(Still……. I don't want to die.)

After hearing that not only their body but also their sense of self were actually fake, getting a game over without having a real body was scary. They were reminded of how important it was for 『CtG』 to be a game that “no matter how realistic it was; you can go home anytime”.

The dimly distorted world seen through her narrowed eyes, Anzu recalled the face inside the mask of the person who tried to break her head open was her

own face. It's clear that the current her was trying to kill the past her.

When she was still in kindergarten she thought of becoming a magical girl and by the time entering elementary school, she's aiming to become a pastry chef. It changed every single time, and now..... what was her dream again?

Wasn't it normal for her "Ghost" self to end up just like her other dying dreams?

Anzu felt composed and closed her eyes.

But no matter how long she waited, the final blow never came.

The knight that was attacking Anzu had turned into a neck-less mannequin.

There's no need to think who did it. It's that girl, even now that girl was massacring both in and out of Anzu's field of vision.

The girl was wearing a witch's pointed hat, black clothes, and wielded two hatchets with her tiny little hands. The figure of her dyeing the clear crystal tower with the letters of blood in a flash was like that of a small black whirlwind.

The only reason why they were able to fight equally on the first floor where they lost in both quality and numbers was thanks to none other than this girl.

(Amazing..... She really is the OKG!)

Finally overcoming the worse, she was impressed. But, even such Haruha was not invisible.

"Haruha-chan, watch out!"

The moment she shouted, it's already too late. Along with the knights who were holding Haruha back, they were hit by powerful electric shock.

Mask number 『1』. It was †Noa†'s work.

Haruha seemed to have retreated with a jump but it should've dealt damage to her. She dropped one of her axes and dropped to one knee. She glared at †Noa† expressionlessly.

"That's not good. Even though this is a game, it's wrong for a kid like you to fight. A kid is born to be loved, protected, and grow. That's the truth.

Let alone to do such scary surprise attack(lie)"

Despite saying so, †Noa† still attacked her. To Anzu, what he did was nothing but eerie. It's also strange how no one had ever seen his "ghost". Could it be that he had this kind of twisted personality like the rest of 《Crystal World》 to begin with? (But Clamp, who nonchalantly carried out a plan using human bombs, was also a problem I think.)

†Noa† stepped up and presented his hand to her.

"I heard that you're an equal existence to Ikui Librium.

But, you won't be able to grow properly in this lie-filled world. You must return to our side before your heart gets changed by the chemical reaction.

Let's become Ikui Librium just like us and live in the world of crystal."

".....Why don't you understand?"

Answered Haruha without a single bit of anger or malice. She just simply wondered from the bottom of her heart, her voice sounding hollow.

"You people hurt Sakura-chan you know?"

You know, Sakura-chan is very good with games, she even gave Haruha a sheep doll, and it made mommy really happy, Sakura-chan also tried her best to defeat daddy, and she taught Haruha that delinquent is strong and cool."

†Noa†— couldn't understand what she's saying. Anzu couldn't either, but she somewhat got what she was trying to say. Yusra, whom Anzu first met as a fellow newbie, continued to support her till she could play by herself.

Yusra was a very blunt and clumsy girl, but she was also very kind and good with taking care of others.

Yusra was that kind of person.

"Haruha..... hates you people."

Haruha stood up.

"To do the same thing with that kind of people—

Haruha, can't stand it, it's sickening!"

The fight between two Yusras had inevitably become a long battle.

“Ghost’s” stats were equal to their counterpart and it was the same for their equipment. Knowing full well the strengths of each other, the two felt hesitant to stand forward.

As if they had forgotten that they were in a virtual world where there’s no pain, the two were awfully anxious.

Losing was not an option. Both of them hated each other.

She wanted to be praised, she didn’t want to be hated, and in doing so she overdid herself and destroyed her own dreams, therefore she hated such an obedient self.

She directed anger to everyone, she rebelled needlessly. In doing so, she refused to acknowledge her own powerlessness and could no longer enjoy the game that she liked. Thus, she hated such an annoying self.

Neither of them would stay sane unless they beat the other person.

There can only be one! —That was the conclusion Yusra had reached as a “Ghost”.

Therefore, Yusra moved in a desperate rush. The other her reflexively intercepted it and launched a counter.

That’s when she grabbed the arm of her other self.

“Aagh…….”

“You’re really naïve huh…… even though we are inside a game, you are always like that.”

That’s why, she was able to predict her attack. It was a battle of wits.

And so she was able to catch “her own” shoulder — The shoulder that was injured in the real world —, and detached it’s joint without hesitation. The abnormal sound of her ligament tearing, which should only ring from inside her body, was played inside her head.

Even though she shouldn’t feel any pain, the eyes inside that mask were wide open…… Did it hurt? It was painful even for a “Ghost” after all.

But the “Ghost” lied to that pain. To change and to grow up she could just lie

to her current self.

After that, that lie would become the truth.

Then, with her strongest offensive Fist skill, Yusra crushed the face of her other self.

—Meanwhile, as Kanna Sakura's fight with herself finally reached a conclusion.

Clamp and Mifa were at their wit's end.

They have used up all possible methods to defeat an opponent who could read other people's mind like in a fantasy novel or manga.

Thinking of nothing but a brick wall— except, they couldn't move while doing that.

Trying to overwhelm her by the sheer number of moves— except, they're no match for Hadzar's battle prowess.

Attack her with a wide AOE (*Area of Effect*) magic or bombs that targeted the entire room— except, she would quickly figure it out and take cover behind Clamp and Mifa's bodies.

Using hypnosis to forget their own plans and wait till that plan was ready to be executed— except, they didn't have any method to hypnotize themselves with.

Presently, after being casted 《Acceleration(Accelerate)》 on him by Mifa, Clamp simply swung his sword furiously. Unsurprisingly all of his attacks were completely blocked.

Ikui loosely held her wand and indifferently stopped attacking.

“There will always will be a few milliseconds of lag before the human body can move in response to the signal sent by their brain. The same applied even in 『CtG』.

But Iku can see that signal. And with Hadzar's processing speed, Iku can plan countermeasures to any actions that is intuitive .”

“.....It's not that you can read other's minds, but you live in a different flow of time compared to other humans, is that what you're saying?”

Clamp clicked his tongue. So it meant, to her, it was like playing a winning game.

Iku heard that with her unchanging, expressionless face. But, she did not ignore it.

“That’s right. It’s accurate to think that the time Iku sees is different compared to other people. But, the same applies for the current humanity.

Since the speed of light is finite, the person that another person sees is actually younger than they currently are, therefore a human is a lonely creature that cannot share the same time with others.

But Iku’s disproportionation unifies their brains, nullifies that lag, the lie of time.”

Iku’s power to unify human beings’ thoughts might be the only solution to unify the time differences between people. But...

“It’s so complicated that I don’t get it but..... isn’t trying to fill up that gap of lag is what makes people grow right!? Once you try to think of the other person, you should be able to know even things 10 years ahead!

That’s right—the feeling for others can surpass time itself!”

Said Mifa strongly. Clamp couldn’t help but laugh.

“I’m amazed you aren’t embarrassed saying that.....”

“I-It’s not embarrassing!

After all, when I thought that Haruha will sleep 3 minutes after getting into bed, she really did. I also know that when you start becoming conscious of my eyes, you will go to the toilet the minute after, Kasugai-kun—Geez, just why do you act so embarrassed like that—

It’s va.... valuable scientific data right!”

Insisted Mifa. Miharuru couldn’t help but feel affection for Haruha who continued to worry about Yusra so much that she couldn’t sleep. Therefore, there’s no way she would admit that her daughter was inferior to Iku.

“”If that is the case, then all you have to do is to be one step ahead of her.”

But, no matter how much she worked her imagination she wouldn't be able to predict Ikui Librium's movement. Ikui wielded her wand like a spear and played around with Clamp's sword, all the while poking at Mifa's staff.

Then the two of them flinched, and were hit by the shockwave magic, 《Shot Blow》. It was not that powerful but they were blown off far away. The same thing happened repeatedly, and the two were defeated despite their two-on-one advantage.

Ikui had low attack power and unlike Haruha or Memento, she didn't attack their weak points, so they were able to survive without receiving a fatal wound.

It's not that she's going easy on them, but it's because Ikui was determined to "Disproportionate" them. Her aim was not to defeat Clamp and Mifa.

Ikui was calm. She delivered a powerful stare that was enough to intimidate her enemies. She's the complete opposite of Haruha who let her emotions control her.

Clamp took a deep breath as he held his single-edged sword(Scaramax)..

(This situation... has deteriorated.)

Ikui's main goal was to separate the two of them and disproportionate either one of them. That's why as long he continued to stay by Mifa's side, she wouldn't go for the kill. But, doing that won't fully prevent her from killing them. As long as one of them received a game over in one way or another, she could just take out the remaining one.

And they did not have the option of retreating. They couldn't just simply use the same tactics twice after all, if they did they wouldn't even be able to face Ikui like this anymore.

And the team below who were holding back the enemy should already be at their limit.

(I wonder what Haruha is doing right now.....)

What came to his mind was a small girl who had just recently became his family. It's hard to imagine that she would lose to a normal human, but he couldn't help but to feel worried.

Haruha's main body was now in the real world, so even if she got a game over she wouldn't disappear. But, if Clamp lost her and let Iku and her 《Crystal World》 run loose, sooner or later they would cause a disturbance and the administration team would have to shut down 『CtG』. If that happened, Haruha could no longer regularly log-in to 『CtG』 and her life would be in crisis as she couldn't clear up all the information processing errors she got from staying in the real world.

He couldn't afford to let himself lose here.

“Why?”

Ikui tilted her head a little.

“Why are you obsessed over fake connections? You two are not connected to Haruha by blood or even have any social obligation towards her.

To begin with, she's just a fake child whom was forced on you two by the institute that is still hiding the truth.”

Clamp and Mifa did not answer.

Just read our minds as you please.

Even if their meeting with Haruha was arranged by someone, even if it was just for the convenient of others, and even if she's not biologically or artificially Yuu and Miharuru's child....

Still, thanks to that lie, Yuu and Miharuru were able to meet Haruha. She happily talked to them, jumped into their arms, and in the end they were able to smile together alongside her bright smile.

He began to understand the meaning of “It's not what is wrong, but when that becomes wrong.” the phrase that Fuyufu had said.

Lies were— “What is not right.”, “What is not truth.”, and “What is different.” were the greatest obstacles in communication, but at the same time, a form of possibility that surpassed the reality.

And that could only be established if there was someone else who possessed a heart that was different from your own.

That's why.

Even if it's sometimes sad, even if it's sometimes painful, even if it's sometimes cruel, and even if it's sometimes messy.

Yuu wished for a world where there were others.

That moment.

A person was climbing the stairs.

Reflexively, he thought it was Payakino who defeated the rest of 《Crystal World》 reinforcements.

It's not. It was someone who shouldn't appear here.

That's why, to Yuu, and Miharu, it was precisely...

“You're lying..... right?”

It was Ren.

A petite girl who was among the herd of “ghosts” hiding in the forest. She participated in this crystal hotel conquer battle. Usually, she hid under the shadow of Anzu.

But Ren wasn't a “Ghost”. Her status data seen through AR mode was not garbled and her name and status were displayed normally.

And right now, she took off her hood that she used to wear and exposed her face. Her black hair flowed out and fluttered right on top her shoulder.

On her face lay a pair of eyes that saw through everything.

—She looked quite different because of her long hair, but there's no doubt that she's Kodzuchi Fuyufu.

“Fuyufu!?”

Yuu(Clamp) yelled at her, but Fuyufu(Ren) ignored him and marched forward.

Her cloak fluttered, revealing her armour that perfectly matched her body-line and the wavy dagger in her hand.

“Follow me, Yuu!”

There's no need for explanation.



With her wavy dagger (Kris Naga), she aimed at Ikui's waist—

Naturally, Ikui Librium noticed that. Her field of vision expanded throughout the entire area of the transparent tower.

And then she figured it out, Ren's—Kodzuchi Fuyufu's plan.

By deeply investigating Kasugai Yuu's personal information and that child, she managed to link herself to the Memento and OKG incident. As she continued to look for Clamp in CtG, she noticed the similarities between the Memento incident and the current bizarre phenomenon where people fell into a coma in real world.

Sniffing out the rumours concerning 《Crystal World》, Ren disguised herself as a “Ghost” to collect information and waited for Clamp's arrival. Putting aside the fact that it's related to “Haruha”, there was no way Yuu would simply allow the guys do weird things in the game his mother made.

Fuyufu herself had no intention of forgiving Ikui who caused troubles for the “Ghost” in Yuu's game.

That's why, she waited for Yuu to knead a plan to defeat Ikui who possesses the power to see into people's mind.

And now, by revealing herself at this moment, she finally executed her plan.

The reason why Ikui Librium did not prevent her scheme was because she had doubts as to whether it's possible or not.

Fuyufu's plan was— to make Yuu confused.

On top of that, she planned to defeat Ikui together with Yuu's help who's in a confused state. With that, there's no way Ikui would be able to read their precise movement and they should be able to find an opening.

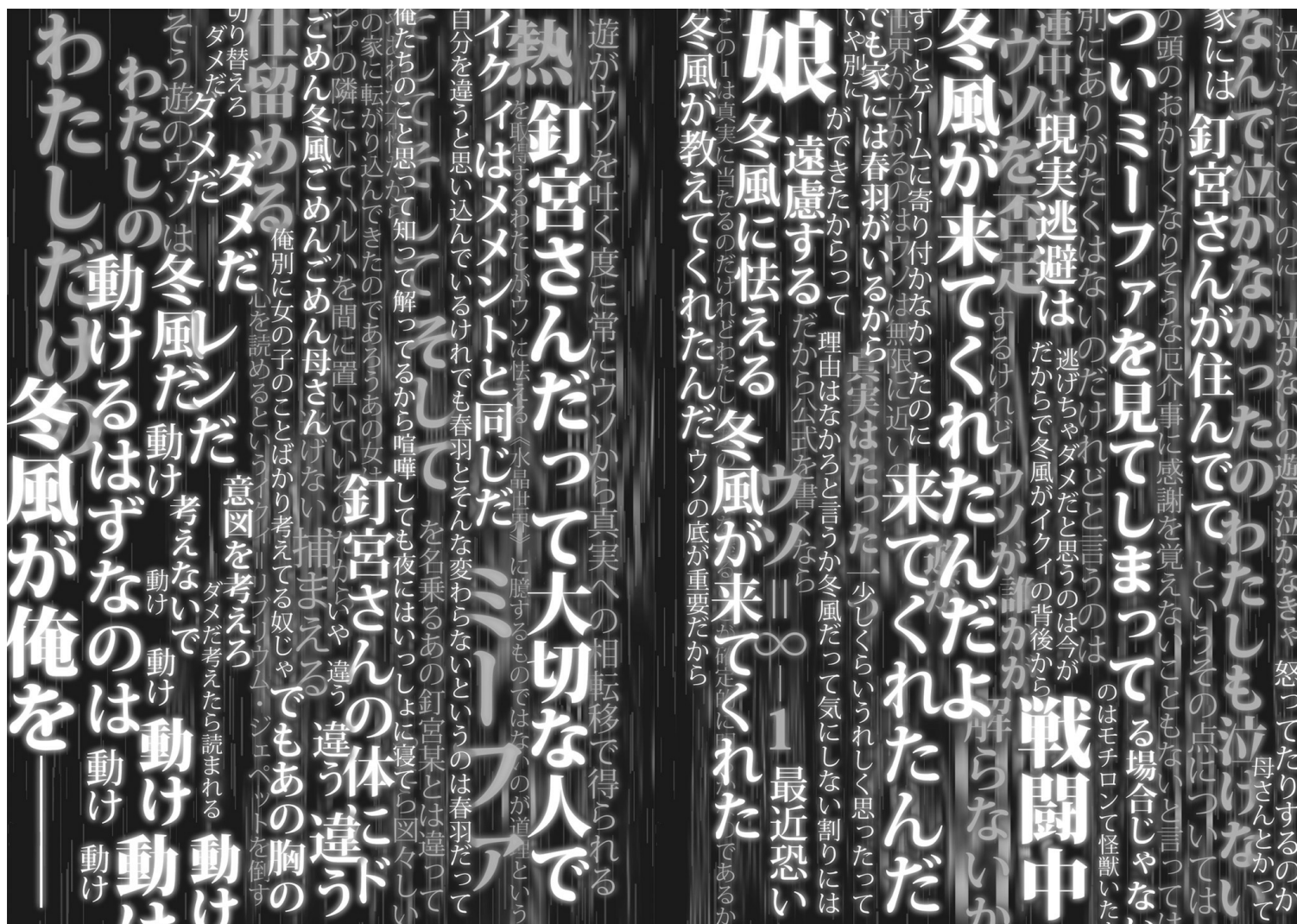
It's reckless. It's tactless. It's absurd.

However, Ren believed that “No matter how confused he become, Yuu should be able to do it.” from the bottom of her heart. In that regard, there was not a single lie in her heart.

That's why Ikui found that incomprehensible and decided to deal with it face to face.

And the images of Clamp's thoughts flowed into her—





—By the time she noticed, she, Ikui Librium, had vomited blood.

While being held tight (TL note: Fuyufu/Ren use (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson_hold) on Ikui) by Ren from behind, she was stabbed by Clamp’s single-edged sword(Scaramax).

Alongside Ren who stopped Ikui’s movement, Clamp’s blade pierced through Ikui’s heart.

Double Hit !

Critical Hit !

On the crystal wall behind the two girls who were pierced through, copious letters of blood were displayed.

“—Got you”

“.....?”

She couldn’t comprehend what just happened.

“Why... why... why were you able to pierce through Ikui while lusting over the

girl you live together with?”

No, judging from the motor orders given from his brain to his muscles, it should be easy for her to avoid him. But, because she was busy tracking the explosive thoughts inside Clamp’s head, she couldn’t move.

Could it be that the thought of understanding Kodzuchi Fuyufu’s intent and the answer to it is mixed somewhere inside that chaotic torrent of thought?

“.....Are you two also an eq(Iku) (TL note: EQ as in Emotional Quotient also known as Emotional Intelligence.) ?”

“No, we’re not. Like hell I can understand what Fuyufu is thinking about. But..... if there’s something I can say about it.”

Clamp gouged in his sword and rapidly reduced her HP. Then he continued.

“It’s 『familiarity』.”

It felt kind of stupid to continue so he stopped— but maybe just like Mifa said, the feeling of wanting to understand someone else might be able to exceed even time.

Ren’s body had already turned into a fibrous corpse. Ikui’s body too started to turn into one. Because she relied on her absolute danger avoidance skill, she did not enhance her strength or defense.

As her consciousness fell alongside her blood, Ikui Librium let out a sigh and cursed.

“Like hell..... I can read that.....!”

That time.

All the masked warrior on the first floor of Crystal hotel stopped moving.

The united thoughts itself had no connection to Ikui’s survival. But, all member of 《Crystal World》 felt the disappearance of Ikui Librium.

Similarly, the “Ghosts” and Haruha stopped moving.

The fight was over.

“Just what.....”

The number 『1』†Noa† who barely survived with just one leg and an eye faced towards the ground with regret.

“Now, it’s no longer possible to spread 《Crystal World》’s teaching.....”

Anzu who somehow managed to survive approached him and asked.

“But, if it continues like this, you..... I mean we, will just be a multiplying machine.”

In other words, a slave of a gene that wished for nothing but self-replication. Though it might sound good in a way.

“If we turn into a machine, we can live on without being betrayed or having to betray someone. No one will fight over the feeling of likes and dislikes. And even if a war is to happen, all we need to do is to adjust the irregularity and everything will end comfortably.

Ikui Librium was a messiah who could turn humans into machine while maintaining their intelligence.”

†Noa† was the only member of 《Crystal World》that fully accepted Ikui’s power while maintaining his original personality. Therefore, he might be the first human to receive Ikui’s copy.

As she looks down at the despairing man, Haruha, who was still holding her blood drenched Hatchet, said.

“It’s more human-like for a person to hate something.”

“Oi, I’m the one who said that first. Don’t steal it.”

Replied Yusra who had fallen on the ground by her side.

Back at the top floor.

“Mifa!”

As Ikui’s body had fully turned into a mannequin confirming that the battle already ended, Clamp called to her desperately

“Y-Yes!?”

Since Fuyufu(Ren)’s appearance, Mifa who was shocked the entire time let out a stupid voice. “What? Is it not over yet?”

But Clamp quickly called out the log out option from the menu screen. Even though it would give him a penalty for using it inside a building.

“Sorry, but, handle the rest okay!”

Leaving that, he disappeared in a hurry.

She didn’t even have time to properly bid farewell.

Miharu(Mifa) quickly figured out what he meant. Even though it was only through her back, that girl made contact with Ikui as she received a game over, he must be going to her place in the real world to check on her condition.

“.....”

Overwhelmed by fatigue, she fell.

“Ahaha..... even in here I became tired due to helping Kasugai-kun.....”

Even though she should hurry up and meet Haruha, she couldn’t stand up properly. She couldn’t help but hate herself.

In a sense, Yuu’s action to check on Fuyufu’s condition as soon as possible was right. It’s wrong to feel shocked over it.

In-spite of that.....

—*poof*

A very soft hand rested on Mifa’s shoulder.

She looked up and saw Payakino, who just reached the top floor, and its face. It’s the face that earnestly looked after Haruha in CtG alongside Mifa and Clamp. Their one additional family member. Looking at it made her feel assured.

Though it might just be because Payakino got hit by fire magic just now, it was emitting a savoury smell.

Part 6

The first time she was ignored by Yuu was during their second year of elementary school, right at the start of summer vacation.

At that time, Yuu and Fuyufu were classmates. When Yuu was spacing out in his seat, she tried to ask about his schedule for the holiday. Shortly afterwards, she realized.

He's hiding something.

So, she pursued him as usual. When they were young, Fuyufu would always expose Yuu's lies and force him to tell the truth, that was their way of communication — That's what Fuyufu thought—.

But, at that time, Yuu went through and played innocent. Instead of carelessly lying that he wasn't hiding anything, he just stayed silent no matter what Fuyufu said to him. He ignored her.

Fuyufu was furious. Mad, she said she won't play with Yuu anymore. Yuu looked surprised— but in the end he didn't apologize.

For three days, the two didn't say anything to each other. Losing to their mothers' demand, the two were together on their way to and back from school, but the two stayed silent and wouldn't even exchange greetings. And sure enough, Yuu stopped coming to Fuyufu's room.

Even though I've been taking care of him like my little brother, does he have any complaints now?

Or has he become embarrassed talking to a girl in class?

Does he, hate me now?

Lunch break. Fuyufu was watching Yuu happily playing with the other boys at the playground and thought as such to herself, but she couldn't find an answer to it.

And then on the third day. Fuyufu, who continued to worry for three days straight, suddenly felt sick in the middle of class, went to the toilet, and vomited.

She cleared all the mud that was overflowing in the cup that was her heart in one go. The last time she ever vomited out of stress was when she first enrolled to this school, this made it the second time. Even though she was finally accustomed to group life, this happened.

The homeroom teacher who was worried about her accompanied her to the toilet, but her voice of concern sounded very annoying at that moment. When she exited the toilet, she met Yuu. It seemed like he came to check on her condition without permission. But Fuyufu didn't say anything. Yuu too, didn't say anything.

Since the next day was a holiday, Fuyufu felt relieved. She didn't have to meet Yuu. The truth that she previously found boring now eased her heart. However, her mother who was secretly preparing lunch looked puzzled.

"Yuu-chan is not coming..... I wonder what happen?"

Just why did she think he will come, she asked her mother but as expected she played dumb. But her mother wasn't as stubborn as Yuu, and maybe because she was feeling worried about Yuu she easily leaked out the truth.

She gave Fuyufu the cake she baked last night and a paper wrapping box with a ribbon on it.

Her mother said it's a birthday cake and a present. The present was a box set of books, bound by a hardcover that Yuu bought with money he saved little by little. It's the box set of the series Fuyufu read once at the nearby library, but there's only the first volume there and the series itself didn't have any E-Book releases.

"Every day Yuu-chan was looking at second hand book store sites and told me after he finally found that."

Fuyufu didn't forgot her own birthday but she barely cared about it. Her parents rarely celebrate her birthday with a party and only settled with giving her a cake. Probably because her body at the time was weak, she hated to think that her birthday was "something special".

That's why, she didn't realize. Yuu just wanted to keep the existence of the present a secret until the day of her birthday, just like what her mother

proposed.

And Yuu's lie that she couldn't expose had taken the form of a clumsily wrapped ribbon.

To tell the truth, she couldn't remember what happened after that. According to her mother, she suddenly took the cake and left the house without a word. And when she chased after her, she found her collapsed in front of Kasugai-san's house.

Luckily the plate did not flip over and the cake was saved, though the second sponge layer of the cake flew off from the shock of the fall and landed on the ground.

At that moment, Fuyufu remembered that Yuu was sitting in front of the gate. Since he told his mother that he will go and celebrate Fuyufu's birthday beforehand, he had no option but to go, but since it's awkward to meet her at the time he chose to just sit outside.

Still lying on the ground, Fuyufu raised her head and yelled at Yuu.

"Why didn't you come!?"

Still sitting, Yuu looked a bit dumbfounded but he answered.

"But..... don't you hate me?"

She still remembered that she had goosebumps at that moment.

"Such a thing—"

What thing, Fuyufu didn't finish. Just that, she knew that her eyes were teary at that time. And when she glared at Yuu, she realized that it was the same for him. Then she cleared her throat.

And, the two of them started crying loudly at the same time.

Yuu's mother, who noticed what happened, and Fuyufu's mother lifted up their children respectively, but the two didn't stop crying. How did this happen? The two asked, but both Fuyufu and Yuu didn't answer, they couldn't. Because, they didn't know themselves.

That's why, the only thing she clearly remembered was, when both of their

mothers were busy clearing the cake that fell, the taste of the lower half of the cake that she ate in Kasugai's house living room. Quickly after that, she got tired and fell asleep.

—Ever since that day Fuyufu was no longer afraid of lies.

That's why, if it's the two of them, they might be able to win against Ikui Librium.

3 weeks ago, Kodzuchi Fuyufu started playing 『CtG』 as Ren. And in merely the first 2 hours of playing, she quickly confirmed that Kasugai Yuu and Clamp of Scarabaeus is the same individual.

During their first year of elementary school, Yuu who had just learnt how to use a dictionary app searched for the word “Kasugai” and got “Clamp” as a result. “Awesome! Look Fuyufu, I'm in the dictionary!” he happily reported to her. Well, it ended up as an embarrassing thing to remember, but ever since, Yuu would always name his character Clamp in any game he played.

Knowing that, Fuyufu looked at the list of Clamp's achievements from the bulletin board log and searched for the word “Marriage” and “Children”.

And what she found was that the player known as Clamp of Scarabaeus who defeated the player killer, Memento, who was rumored to possess the ability to drive players whom she killed into a comatose state in real life. And during the same incident, he's reported to have come in contact with a little girl, the Over Kill Girl, a player who annihilated all NPCs in the town. (However as for the NPC massacre part, it's suspected that the true culprit is The Kidnapper of the Wilderness, Paya The Kid.)

And to add on, it's clear that in the past several months, Clamp had been playing together with a girl named Mifa. Mifa.....

『Pleased to be your acquaintance. My name is Kugimiya Miharu』

Miharu. It's that woman. I'm sure of it.

Clamp, OKG, and Mifa. I'll surely unravel their secret!

And to observe the《Crystal World》that will surely attract Clamp, she decided to infiltrate the “Ghosts” that started appearing at the same time. The “Ghosts”

can't use AR mode so all she had to do was to just randomly match her story with theirs and be wary of witnesses when she logged out. No one suspected a thing.

And when she dealt with Mifa and her friends, she would pretend to be a "Ghost" by adjusting the position of her AR tag and hide her status behind it.

In the end, she couldn't figure out the identity of Clamp's gang, and thanks to her efforts of hiding her identity as Ren, she managed to fool Ikui and beat her.

Thinking it would surprise Yuu, she decided to show up at that moment, the moment where Fuyufu shouldn't have been there. And in spite of the circumstance, he would surely figure out her true intentions and act accordingly. Fuyufu thought so.

And so, Clamp pierced his sword through Ikui and Ren, who held onto Ikui, together and lead to the demise of《Ctystal World》.

In the end Ren got a game over and—

—Fuyufu opened her eyes, finding herself lying on top of the bed she had been using ever since elementary school inside of her dimly lit room.

She turned off the power of her Ramiel, that was displaying the game over penalty info and count down timer to be able to login again, and took it off her head.

She smiled.

What is Yuu doing I wonder. Is he still in 『CtG』? Either way, he must be confused now more than ever.

He thought he hid himself pretty well, but Fuyufu found out about him. To top it off, he was saved by her right in the most desperate of situations.

(With this, Yuu won't able to raise his head in front of me anymore.....)

She can't hold down her grin. Now that it had come this far, it won't be hard to force him to confess everything about Kugimiya Miharuru and "Haruha".

Yuu might be calling in right about now. She thought and pulled out her phone, but her phone was off. She then remembered that she turned it off herself, thinking it would be bad to receive a call while she's pretending to be a

“Ghost”.

Well, he will surely say something tomorrow.

When that time comes, she thought of playing stupid. As she was thinking that, the house front door chime rang. Eh? Without a moment of pause, she heard the sound of her mother answering the door—

『Ara, long time no see Yuu-chan. Ah, could it be the call from before was from Yuu-chan? I’m sorry, I was cooking—』

『I’m sorry auntie! Fuyufu’s room is the same as before, right?』

『Eh? Yes..... but she said not to come in.....』

Her mother’s voice faded away and she heard the sound of footsteps in exchange. It’s approaching fast, with great force too.....

The footsteps quickly reached the second floor and stopped in front of Fuyufu’s room.

For the first time in her life, Fuyufu swiftly pulled the thin sheet of her bed and closed her legs. Her room was pretty hot and she never thought anyone would come in so she’s dressed in a sloppy manner that she wouldn’t dare to show to anyone.

And without even a knock, the door was opened wide. And there stood Yuu, who was breathing heavily.

The hallway was dark at the moment so she couldn’t clearly see Yuu’s expression.

“Eh? What.....?”

She let out an idiotic voice, very unlike herself. It’s clear why he came here. But, she didn’t think he would burst into her room all of a sudden.

Even though he had stopped coming all this time.

Yuu didn’t answer Fuyufu’s question. He entered the room without a word, and dropped to his knees on top of the bed where Fuyufu was. The bed that she had been using since she was little sunk and shook.

Fuyufu suddenly felt afraid witnessing such strength, weight, and shaking. And

involuntarily—he grabbed Fuyufu’s wrist, that seemed as though they were going to push him away for self-defence. It hurt. But, she wasn’t weeping because of the pain, just that she realized what she thought hadn’t change had changed.

“You.....”

While panting, Yuu finally said a word.

“Why, why did you do such a thing.....?”

How many years had it been since the last time he had been sitting on this bed. That aside, now that they’re this close to each other she was finally able to see Yuu’s expression.

He’s making the same face he made that day when she dropped her cake.

The tears that were accumulating in his eyes finally flowed down his cheeks.

Yuu cried.

Strength left her stiff body. She realized it was her fault.

“You must’ve heard it from Yusra and others right, Ikui wasn’t an ordinary opponent. If I failed, you might change..... I didn’t want that to happen”

She more or less guessed it. When he refused to tell the truth to Fuyufu, it must be because he didn’t want her to get involved with dangerous stuff.

But, she didn’t think he would make such a face. She didn’t think he would cry. That alone, she didn’t expect.

Now that her trembling throat calmed down, she asked back.

“Why..... why do you make such a face?”

“That because..... I was afraid. All of a sudden you did such a thing, and to beat Ikui you might try to drag her down along with yourself, when I think so I.....”

“Even though you didn’t cry when your mother died. I’ve never seen you cry ever since.”

She might be saying that out of mischief. But Yuu quietly gave an unexpected answer.

“.....That time, I thought I didn’t have the right to cry. I was a bad kid who didn’t even realize that his mother was dying..... and since I didn’t cry when my mother died I thought I mustn’t cry over anything else.”

“And even so, you cry now?”

“.....Haruha, she cried.”

Yuu loosened his grip that took hold of Fuyufu’s wrist.

“Haruha..... that kid you mean?”

Yuu nodded and she smiled, and after that he finally told her the truth.

That he caused a 《Wedding》 event with Miharu(Mifa) in 『CtG』.

And shortly after that, Haruha was born and they raised her inside the game.

And one day, all of a sudden, Haruha shows up in the real world, and along with Miharu, the three of them started living together.

In order to protect Haruha, they fought Memento.

That moment, Haruha whom had never cried before cried—

And Yuu who saw that was finally able to cry again. After he finished telling everything he calmed down, and averted his eyes out of embarrassment. It seemed he finally realized what he just did in her room and the vulgar appearance she was currently in.

After hearing everything, Fuyufu narrowed her eyes.

“Is that so.”

She extended her hand naturally and reach out to Yuu’s head.

“O, oi!”

“So after raising Haruha, you finally learned how to cry again huh, Yuu.”

And also, how to go inside her room too.

It’s a bit frustrating that she managed to do something she couldn’t do, but she must thank that child for it. That weird child who was born from a game and possessed the name of the doll she had.

Yuu, who had his head on Fuyufu’s chest, said nothing in response and

stiffened.

Not in a strange sense, but it was just naturally like this. If Yuu's mother was still alive. she might've done the same, she thought.

The insects outside the window started crying and some time had passed. Yuu finally said something in a tense hoarse voice.

“.....Fuyufu? Could it be Ikui did something to you—”

“Thank You.”

“Eh?”

She wouldn't say it twice. Because Yuu might not miss it again, so she remained silent.

After that, once again the insects started crying.

And the two of them became one with the shadow of the night for a while.

All until they realized that they were watched by Fuyufu's mother, who was watching them with sparkling eyes, together with Fuyufu's father, who was wielding a metal bat while emitting strong killing intent.



Epilogue

“Yo, welcome.”

Memento Coppelion, wearing the school uniform of Kasugai Yui's school, wrapped with a restraining belt, which is a clearly strange-looking outfit to be in, happily welcomed the newcomer.

In the middle of the jet-black space, a wall-less classroom appeared mysteriously.

In that place, Ikui Librium appeared.

Somehow she wore the same uniform as Memento, but without the restraining belt.

“There are plenty of seats left, but given the opportunity would you like to sit next to Meme?”

Within the classroom there were 30 seats lined up, and Memento was sitting right in the middle seat.

“Look, same as you I was also killed by Onii-san. Meme's stomach were torn into two, like—”

Ikui was unable to answer Memento. Then all of a sudden, a figure appeared on top of the platform-like spot within the space. It's an old man who was called as Maharli by Niiru.

“Oho, our teacher has arrived. Better hurry up and get to your seat”

Memento felt a little happy that her remark was ignored by the old man.

Maharli dutifully open his mouth.

“You who had been defeated by Haruha is now a reserve. Therefore, I'll have you spend your time in this isolated place.”

“Won't you dispose off or seal me?”

Maharli nodded easily to Ikui's apathetic question. It's simple to guess the flow

of this conversation just by visualizing the face of the person she's talking to, but there was no need to do that.

"Normally it should be the case. Your existence has been marked by the Population Control Board. However, Niuro Mansei said he wanted me to entrust you to him as a sample."

"Is that so..."

"In other word you will no longer under by supervision. Do you have anything to say?"

Ikui hesitated. Maharl raised his eyebrows. This abrasive attitude means?

".....I met some interesting people.

To love, to not be separated, to hate, to be hated, to be together, to have one's own feeling reach another, to not be not touched by others, to not go away— and much more, all of their emotions, all of that which are not lies, moreover it all intertwined with each other in a complicated fashion.

It is something that Iku couldn't read; they are people who Iku can't understand..... Iku finally met 'someone else'."

Ikui appeared to be blushing. And because of her clothes, she appeared to be a simple clumsy kid. Maharl closed his eyes.

"Is that so. Self-consciousness is the power to explore the heart of a personality different from one's own, to identify the similarity and differences of one's own heart, all in order to communicate with others. You finally encountered those who you can't read with your ability for the first time, and by showing interest in those people you finally attained a sense of self, it seems."

Niuro must be interested in this. If she proceeds like this she might be able to grow like Haruha, to a stage where she would attain emotions close to that of a human.

However, that means she will lose worth as Maharl's experimental body.

That's why Maharl turned his back to Ikui who had no words left to say. He still has the mission to create a Hadzar, based on Ikui Librium data, that has higher adaptability.

Ikui silently saw off the human she first met when she was first born in this virtual world.

“Niiro-kun.”

When Maharl speaks, Niiro’s figure appeared by his side.

“Yes?”

“About, Ikui Librium. May I continue to observe her progress from here on?”

“Of course.”

After that final exchange, the old man and Niiro’s figures disappeared. No one knows where they went. Ikui faintly sighed.

“So Iku-san can read a human’s heart huh~”

Now that the adults finally left, Memento once again started to talk.

“That’s right. However, I was just shown the limit of that ability.”

“How about Meme? What kind of bug is crawling around in Meme’s head?”

“.....”

Ikui squinted her eyes and looked at Memento— after that, she shook her head.

“It’s all messy and cluttered.”

Ikui then sat on the seat next to Memento’s.



Days passed.

The Kasugai household was in the middle of summer vacation.

Yuu and Miharu, who had just returned from shopping under the scorching sun, found a pair of unfamiliar sneakers at the entrance.

“So she came again.....”

“It’s okay right?”

“I didn’t say it’s a bad thing though.”

Yuu felt a bit conflicted, but Miharu was straightforwardly happy. The two

later entered the lightly cooled living room and heard an electric sound echo inside.

“Hrmm? Galaxian Axe won’t show up?”

“It’s hard to time it after doing a big punch. Beginners should start small. Small I tell you!?”

In front of a large TV in the living room, Haruha and Kanna Sakura sat alongside each other and played a game. Playing a retro “Television Game” with Yuu’s mother’s treasured console game collection from the storeroom is one of Kasugai household trends.

To begin with, it all began after Yuu accidentally said “I have the early version of that console fighting game in my house”, and Sakura couldn’t help but to search throughout the house to find that.

Ever since then, Sakura continued to visit the Kasugai household to play using various excuses. Especially since starting summer vacation where she comes to visit every day.

Unlike the “Ghosts” and 《Crystal World》members, Sakura who knew about Haruha’s circumstances was in an odd position. That’s why; Hajime and the human equilibrium institute said that it’s better to keep her under their protection.

In other words, they’re monitoring her.

By the way, thanks to Sakura being Haruha’s playmate, Hajime can comfortably rest on top of the sofa. In a slouching position Hajime faces her laptop, doing her job at incredible speeds considering the sloppy position she’s in.

She might just simply want to relax, now that she doesn’t have to take care of Haruha.

“We’re back~”

“Ah! It’s Daddy and Mommy!”

Haruha who was looking at the controller instead of the screen quickly raised her head in excitement and ran towards them. Since he entered the room a

minute faster, Yuu opened his arm wide to welcome her— but she suddenly changed direction and hugged Miharuru instead.

“Wha, why.....?”

While burying her face into Miharuru’s chest, Haruha flatly answered.

“Because, Daddy, you’re sweaty.”

It was really hot out there so it can’t be helped right..... as he thought so, Yuu collapsed. So, Miharuru is okay..... Is it because she’s a girl.....?

Miharuru glanced at him giving an triumphant look before dragging Haruha to the kitchen.

“Senpai. Stop weeping and fight me instead. Haruha doesn’t make a worthy opponent at all”

Sakura was clearly trying to hold down her laughter and Yuu frowned.

“.....You’re a girl after all so don’t do such a thing”

Sakura is skillfully lifting the controller cable with her toes and Yuu pointed it out about her. It appeared that she didn’t have the habit of wearing socks indoors.

“Come on~, don’t say such a father-like thing~”

Sakura is “His daughter’s friend”. So, he might end up saying it in such a manner because of that.

“Or more like, is it okay for you to be here? Though, I’m grateful that you’re playing with Haruha.....”

“It’s okay, it’s okay..... My friends over at school are busy with their clubs at noon.”

“Ah..... sorry.”

He apologized as he recalled Sakura’s injury.

But,

“It’s okay. Somehow, it’s all okay, now.

Now I can proudly say I’ve grown that I’ve done what I wanted to do. That’s

why, I'm looking for the next thing I want to do"

She doesn't sound like she was acting tough. Not that it justifies it, but Sakura might have had something in her mind after the 《Crystal World》 incident. She also appeared to be purely enjoying herself playing the game.

Yuu felt saved a bit.

"Is that so..... But, you must behave yourself in another person's house, okay?"

He pulled Sakura's leg and took the controller.

"Fueeee!?"

Sakura let out a cat-like voice and quickly rounded up her toes.

"Wha, what's up with that. Don't let out strange voices like that!"

"Y-You touched me all of a sudden..... Stop it."

For someone who is practicing Judo she appeared to be hypersensitive. Yuu paid no heed to that and sat in front of the TV.

"Well, I'll be your opponent, but don't be mad at me if you lose okay"

"You sure speak well, even though Senpai's winning percentage is lower than mine"

Sakura quickly stood up and opened the versus menu—

But then, the entrance bell rang.

"Yes, yeeees~, Haruha will pick it up~"

As Haruha come running from the kitchen Sakura intercepted her and stopped her from going. After he praised her by saying 'Nice play', Yuu stood up and headed towards the entrance.

He didn't recall ordering anything, and if it's a neighbor that has business with him, it would be problematic if someone other than Yuu comes to greet them. During weekdays, Hajime would thoroughly pretend to be out.

—An unknown girl appeared on the intercom screen. She appeared to be as old as Yuu, but he had no recollection of her at all. She might be Miharu's friend

who came to ask about her though.....

That aside, Yuu tried to talk to her over the intercom.

“Yes, is something the matter?”

To answer his voice, the camera screen displayed the face of the girl. Even over the camera, the girl’s confident, aggressive personality could be felt.

As expected he doesn’t know her— but she appeared to be familiar.

And then the girl spoke through the intercom and produced a high-pitched voice.

『Haruha, the first successful unit of New Humanity.

In other word, my daughter. I came to pick her up!』

End of volume 2.

Credits

CtG—Zero Kara Sodateru Dennou Shoujo Volume 2

Author: Gangudou.

Illustrator: bun150.

English translations: [Terminus Translation](#).

Ebook: dreamer2908.

Contents were fetched on 2016-12-09 from the translation group's website.